

Wisconsin

Department of Natural Resources

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Special Edition

2003 Wisconsin Fishing Report

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Hello and welcome to Wisconsin's 2003 fishing season. As DNR Secretary and an avid angler myself, I'm particularly pleased to bring you our annual report of fishing forecasts, regulation changes and other news.

Our population surveys and the habitat protection and restoration projects we've done in recent years point to another great year on the water. Musky populations are at or near-historic highs; trout anglers will find 10,000 miles of class I, II, and III streams to fish, Lake Winnebago walleye populations are in excellent shape, and Lake Michigan chinook fishing should be strong again, although likely cooler than 2002's torrid action. And that's just for starters. Read on to learn more.

Fishing is an important part of our outdoor lifestyle, our culture, and increasingly, our economy.

- 1.4 million anglers 16 years and older fished 22 million days in Wisconsin in 2001, including about 23 percent of Wisconsin's adult population.
- They spent more than \$1.22 billion on fishing gear and trip-related expenses. That translates into a \$2.3 billion economic impact, supports more than 26,000 jobs, and generates \$90 million in sales and income tax revenue to help pay for important services such as education and health care.

Fishing is part of the fabric of our state, and the glue that binds our families and friends together. I grew up fishing in a family where my dad wouldn't pass a puddle without throwing a line in, and was lucky enough to crisscross the state fishing in a variety of Wisconsin's beautiful waters. As an adult, I've shared my love of fishing with my own children, and I like nothing better than sitting in a boat on Wisconsin waters, row trolling for musky. Join me this year in creating some new memories on Wisconsin waters.

Sincerely,

Scott Hassett

DNR Secretary



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[EDITOR'S ADVISORY: *This 2003 Wisconsin Fishing Report has also been produced in newsprint format with photographs and additional graphs. The newsprint copy is available at DNR Service Centers and limited copies have been distributed to DNR license agents to distribute with fishing regulations. This document is posted on the DNR Web site and may be downloaded in both Rich Text Format and Portable Document Format. From the DNR home page, click on the "News & Events" button and then the link at the bottom of that page to Special Editions of the DNR News to reach links for all the versions of this document.]*

#

2003 shaping up as another strong year for Lake Michigan fishing

Salmon and trout fishing was excellent in Lake Michigan and tributary streams during 2002-- the catch rate for the overall salmon fishery was about 18 fish for every 100 hours of fishing, and that's the best catch rate over the entire 18 years of data.

Chinook fishing during the last two years was the best in 15 years, fueled mainly by an extremely abundant year class that was stocked in 1999. The chinook harvests during 2001 (191,378) and 2002 (275,454) were the highest since 1987. Most of the 1999 fish have finished their life cycle. With average-size year classes providing the fishery for 2003, catches of chinook should be good, but we won't see the phenomenal catches of 2001 and 2002.

During 2002, the abundant adult chinook population out-competed other species for food, as evidenced by small sizes of coho, steelhead and 1-year-old chinook. A reduced chinook population will increase forage and produce larger fish of all these species.

Coho were abundant: the harvest of 102,313 was also right up there with the better years, but average size was somewhat down during 2002. Coho size may be below average in spring 2003, but less competition with chinook should allow rapid growth. Spring coho fishing can be some of the fastest salmon action on Lake Michigan, with multiple strikes common. Wisconsin's Lake Michigan coho fishery begins in the south (Kenosha and Racine) in April and May. The coho fishing gradually moves north as water temperatures rise, typically reaching Milwaukee in May and Port Washington and Sheboygan by June.

Despite sparse rainfall and low fall flows in the tributaries, record numbers of chinook were seen at all the egg-collection facilities. The Root River egg-collection facility handled 1,303 steelhead during March and April 2002. The spring stream fishery saw good catches of steelhead during the same period.

(more)

During fall, a record number of chinook salmon were passed at the Root River facility, and 250 Skamania-strain steelhead were collected for our propagation program. As always, the tributary fishery depends on water temperature and flow conditions, which trigger upstream migration of the salmonids.

We expect a good tributary fishery in 2003 if the weather conditions are favorable. One additional rainbow trout strain, the Arlee, was stocked on an experimental basis in 2001 and 2002. It is hoped that this strain of rainbow trout will provide a nearshore fishery in the coming years.

Catches of brown trout in the spring of 2002 were the best in recent years. Browns provide a consistent nearshore fishery during the cold months, especially at warm-water discharges and near river mouths. We see dependable returns on domestic brown trout, while the fast-growing, hard-fighting Seeforellen strain continues to add excitement to the brown trout fishery. We annually stock about 90,000 Seeforellen and 400,000 domestic brown trout in southeast Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan.

The lake trout season was good in 2002 when anglers chose to target them. We believe that recent stockings of nearshore sites have contributed to the strong lake trout fishery, and this trend should continue in 2003.

Although the yellow perch population in Lake Michigan continues to be depressed, fishing from the piers and shore was very good at times in spring and summer 2002. The 1998 year class continues to support more than 90 percent of the harvest, but their numbers are declining as time goes on. Average size of perch has increased dramatically as the 1998s continue to grow. There appears to have been a successful perch hatch on Lake Michigan and Green Bay during 2002. If these fish carry through the winter, they will begin to provide a fishery by late 2003 and 2004. Perch fishing continues to be closed from May 1 to June 15 to protect mature females before spawning.

Many of our harbors have seen habitat improvements over the last decade. This has translated into increasing populations of smallmouth bass and northern pike, two native species to Lake Michigan. Fishing for these species has increased as more anglers have learned to target them.

Walleye are stocked in the Milwaukee River as part of a walleye restoration plan. The walleye have shown good survival and high growth rates.

To read information about our Lake Michigan program visit <http://www.fishingwisconsin.org> then look under "Fisheries Program" to find "Lake Michigan." – *John Kubisiak, Lake Michigan fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

#

Anglers catch nearly 49 million fish in 2000/2001

1 of 3 caught are kept

By Lisa Gaumnitz, public affairs manager, Madison

Results from the first statewide mail survey of Wisconsin's licensed anglers in recent times has revealed that anglers caught an estimated 48,809,470 sport fish and kept about a third of them -- 19,256,962-- in the fishing season that began May 5, 2000, and ended March 3, 2001.

Based on estimates developed from the survey returns, Wisconsin's 1.4 million licensed anglers spent an estimated 33,885,154 hours fishing during that 2000/2001 angling season, according to Dee McClanahan, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point graduate student who conducted the survey.

Bluegills remained the most popularly caught fish: anglers hauled in an estimated 18,088,986 from April 1, 2000 to March 31, 2001, but only took home 8,788,416 of them, McClanahan says.

Yellow perch and crappie followed in second and third in popularity, with walleyes in fourth. "Anglers caught an estimated 5,321,877 walleye and kept 1,332,109 on their stringers," he says.

Mike Staggs, who directs the Department of Natural Resources' Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection program, said the survey results provide reliable estimates of statewide harvests by anglers.

Such information is vital to allow fisheries managers to provide sustainable fisheries and ecosystems and assure recreational opportunities for anglers. But generating statewide estimates of anglers' catch has been difficult in the past without interviewing large number of anglers, an expensive and time-consuming process.

Development of DNR's automated licensing system in the late 1990s allowed the agency to easily access large number of anglers to survey, and DNR contracted with the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to conduct the survey and use its results to estimate the statewide catch.

McClanahan, under the direction of Michael Hansen, a UWSP professor, used names selected at random from the licensing database to survey about 2,500 licensed anglers every two weeks about their fishing experience. He sent a questionnaire to a total of 53,312 people over the 2000/2001 angling season, asking them to complete the survey based on how long they fished, how many fish they kept, the fish they pursued, and where they fished during a previous two-week period.

"Even though the survey is not specific to particular waters, it will be a great tool in the future to help us track general trends in what anglers catch," McClanahan says. DNR hopes to repeat the survey in future years.

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**Statewide angling catch and harvest of 12 fish species
As estimated by mail survey in 2000-2001 license year**

| Species | Estimated Catch | Estimated Harvest |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| bluegill | 18,088,986 | 8,788,416 |
| Yellow perch | 6,132,700 | 3,155,955 |
| crappie | 5,538,041 | 3,350,242 |
| walleye | 5,321,877 | 1,332,109 |
| Largemouth bass | 3,176,948 | 310,364 |
| Northern pike | 2,620,566 | 515,119 |
| Smallmouth bass | 2,279,631 | 177,052 |
| catfish | 774,940 | 266,146 |
| Brook trout | 748,087 | 152,602 |
| Brown trout | 668,306 | 151,036 |
| muskellunge | 210,006 | 22,229 |
| All species | 48,809,470 | 19,256,962 |

Anglers spent more days and more money fishing in Wisconsin in 2001

National survey finds state continues to buck national trend of declining numbers

By Lisa Gaumnitz, public affairs manager, Madison

MADISON – More than 1.4 million anglers 16 years and older spent 22 million days fishing in Wisconsin in 2001, helping generate \$2.3 billion in economic activity and \$90 million in state tax revenues to help pay for critical services such as education and health care, according to recently released results of a national survey of wildlife-related recreation.

The results from the 2001 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* indicate that Wisconsin bucked national trends of declining time spent fishing and declining expenditures on fishing. Nationally, about 16 percent of adults fished in 2001, down 3 percent from the previous 1996 national survey. U.S. anglers spent 17 percent less on fishing-related trips and gear in 2001 than in 1996.

Wisconsin results from the national telephone survey estimated that:

- 1,412,000 anglers 16 years and older fished 22,042,000 days in Wisconsin in 2001 and spent \$1.22 billion. That compares to 1,474,000 anglers spending 17,130,000 days fishing and \$1 billion in Wisconsin in 1996.
- Anglers fishing in Wisconsin included 941,000 Wisconsin residents 16 and older, or 23 percent of the adult population. That's down about 1 percent since 1996.

Mike Staggs, director of DNR fisheries management and habitat protection, found good and bad news in the USFWS survey results.

"The good news is there's a reversal in a long-standing decline in the number of days people fished, and I'd like to think it's because we've been doing a lot in the last three to five years to promote fishing and make fishing better, both at the state and national levels," Staggs says. "Also, the total expenditures and economic output attributed to sport fishing is up even despite a tough economy."

The total economic impact of sportfishing to Wisconsin's economy was \$2.3 billion, sixth highest in the nation and up from \$2.1 billion in 1996, according to further analysis of the USFWS survey numbers conducted for the American Sportfishing Association.

In addition, sport fishing in 2001 provided more than 26,000 jobs in Wisconsin and brought in \$90 million in sales and income tax revenue for the state's general purpose fund, less than 1 percent of which the Legislature returned to DNR to support fisheries management.

The bad news, Staggs says, is that the proportion of Wisconsin residents who fish dropped from 24 to 23 percent, even as the number actually increased slightly from 936,000 in 1996 to 941,000 five years later. "We're concerned about that percentage and what that will mean for the future of fishing and the future of our natural resources," he says. "Anglers are traditionally strong supports of resource conservation programs, and we need active, concerned anglers to help protect our fisheries resources in the future."

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Renovation plan approved for Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery

Seeks updates to meet environmental laws, replace worn-out facilities

By Lisa Gaumnitz, public affairs manager, Madison

The century-old Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery would receive a \$22.5 million overhaul under a feasibility study approved by the state Natural Resources Board in fall 2002. The renovation would allow the aging hatchery, a critical component of Wisconsin's fish stocking program, to meet environmental laws written since its construction, replace worn out facilities, and allow for expanded production of trout, salmon, walleye, northern pike and lake sturgeon.

"We're pleased the board has approved the plan and we will be working in coming months to secure the funding necessary to update this critical facility," says Mike Staggs, who leads the Department of Natural Resources fisheries management and habitat protection program. "Wild Rose is very important in providing fishing opportunities, in fueling the state's economy, and in generating tax revenues for critical services such as education and health care for Wisconsin's elderly citizens."

Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery now produces 27 percent of the trout and salmon, 64 percent of the northern pike, 100 percent of lake sturgeon and Great Lakes strain spotted musky stocked statewide.

But Wild Rose's ability to continue meeting the demand for fishing opportunities is threatened by its aging facilities and a groundwater supply system that fails to meet state environmental standards, according to Al Kaas, statewide propagation coordinator. A system of flowing springs and artesian wells naturally bring groundwater to the surface, allowing DNR to avoid the high cost of using electricity to pump water to the surface.

"The facility is under a compliance order from DNR's groundwater program to correct all groundwater well issues," Kaas says. "In addition, these water supply problems are now contributing to decreases in fish production and fish health."

Current well code does not allow these wells to be replaced with a similar system.

In addition, output of the current water supply wells has diminished over time, and water quality problems that include pathogens, siltation, debris, excessive dissolved nitrogen, and storm water runoff have limited fish production and caused disease problems, Kaas says. The failure last year of one of the artesian wells supplying the hatchery with water forced DNR to shift production of 200,000 chinook to other state facilities.

Another problem driving the renovation is that many of the facilities built since the state bought Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery in 1908 have reached the end of their useful life and are not functioning as they should despite regular maintenance.

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“The pond walls and bulkheads leak water and some allow fish to swim from one raceway section to another,” Kaas says. “This situation makes it impossible to keep different species and strains separate. The deterioration of the raceway and pond walls pose safety concerns for staff who work at the hatchery and the people who visit it.”

Kaas and other DNR propagation officials identified overhauling Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery as the top priority in the action plan they were required to develop after a Legislative Audit Bureau review of Wisconsin’s propagation system. Renovating Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery ranked as the hatchery system’s top priority because of its location in central Wisconsin, near many inland and Lake Michigan stocking sites, and its abundant land and groundwater resources. These benefits make the hatchery one of the state’s most cost-efficient facilities.

A feasibility study conducted by Liesch Consulting of Madison and Fish Pro of Springfield Illinois in 2002 calls for a \$22.5 million investment in Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery to meet state groundwater laws and replace the worn out facilities.

The renovation would require building essentially two new facilities – a cold water hatchery for trout and salmon and a warm water hatchery for northern, musky, walleye and sturgeon. The project would preserve for use as a visitor center a portion of the historic hatchery, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s.

Some existing buildings would be demolished and the former wetlands they’re now located in would be restored, Kaas says.

Once completed, the project gives the hatchery the potential to expand production of trout and salmon fingerlings by 200,000, walleye by 460,000, northern pike by 40,000, and sturgeon by 70,000.

The Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery renovation project would occur over two biennia because of the project size, bonding costs, and the importance of maintaining fish production and stocking program during construction, Kaas says.

Other strategies Wisconsin plans to pursue to ensure the hatchery system can do its part to meet the growing demand for fishing include rehabilitating other aging state hatcheries, increasing the use of private hatcheries and cooperative agreements with sporting clubs to raise fish, and increasing the efficiency of the propagation system to help meet the stocking needs.

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Major fishing regulation changes for 2003-2004

By Patrick Schmalz, warmwater lakes fisheries specialist, Madison

The complete 2003-2004 Guide to Wisconsin Hook and Line Fishing Regulations is available at DNR offices and license agents. It also can be found in portable document format (.pdf) by visiting www.fishingwisconsin.org, then look under the "Fishing in Wisconsin" for "Regulations" or contact the Bureau of Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection at (608) 267-7498 for more details.

The following new major rule changes take effect April 1, 2003, unless noted:

Trout Regulations Simplification

The entire trout regulation category system was simplified, with the changes effective March 1, 2003. Category 1 waters, those which had no minimum length limit and a 10 fish daily bag limit, were eliminated, and the number of waters listed in categories 2, 3, and 4 were reduced. This change resulted in 546 fewer waters needing to be listed in the trout regulations. The different types of special regulations, category 5, were reduced from 12 to 8, affecting 50 waters. An additional 55 waters now have special regulations. To check on specific changes, please see the Wisconsin Trout Fishing Regulations and Guide, 2003-2004.

Cisco (lake herring) and whitefish in the Great Lakes

The daily bag limit for cisco, lake herring, whitefish, and their hybrids has been changed to 10 fish in total on all Great Lakes waters.

Muskellunge in Green Bay and Lake Michigan

The minimum length limit for muskellunge has been increased to 50 inches on Green Bay, Lake Michigan and Lake Michigan tributaries in the northern muskellunge zone (north of Waldo Boulevard in the City of Manitowoc).

Yellow perch in Lake Michigan

The closed season for yellow perch has been changed to May 1 through June 15 on Lake Michigan and tributaries.

Salmon in Lake Superior

The 15-inch minimum length limit for salmon on Lake Superior has been eliminated.

Brook trout in Lake Superior

The minimum length limit for brook trout on Lake Superior has been increased to 20 inches and the daily bag limit has been reduced to 1.

Unattended fishing lines

During the open-water portion of the fishing season, anglers will be required to remain within 100 yards of all their lines at all times.

Sturgeon spearing

The deadline for registering a sturgeon speared from Lake Winnebago system waters has been permanently changed to 1:30 p.m. on the day speared and the closed hours for sturgeon spearing have been changed to 12:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. the following day. This rule went into effect as an emergency rule for the 2002 spearing season.

Special regulations by county

Size and/or bag limits that differ from the statewide rules have been established on the following waters:

Bayfield County – A catch and release only season has been established for brook trout on Whittlesey Creek, the Bark River, and their tributaries.

Green Lake County – The gamefish season on Big Green Lake has been changed to the statewide open season and is now open from the first Saturday in May until March 1.

Kenosha County – The minimum length limit for bass has been increased to 18 inches, the daily bag limit for bass reduced to one in total, and the daily bag limit for panfish has been reduced to 10 in total on Vern Wolf Lake.

Langlade County – The minimum length limit for bass on Greater Bass Lake has been increased to 18 inches and the daily bag limit reduced to one in total.

Oneida County – The minimum length limit for muskellunge on Clear Lake has been increased to 50 inches.

Sawyer County – The minimum length limit for muskellunge on Moose Lake has been increased to 40 inches. The minimum length limit for muskellunge on the Chippewa Flowage has been increased to 45 inches. The daily bag limit for panfish on Sissabagama Lake has been reduced to 10 in total. A 14-18 inch protected slot limit with only one fish longer than 18 inches allowed has been established for walleye on Winter Lake and the Brunet River upstream from Winter Lake to the Lake Loretta dam. The minimum length limit for walleye on Black Dan, Clear, and Island lakes has been increased to 28 inches and the daily bag limit reduced to one.

Vilas County – The minimum length limit for walleye on Escanaba Lake has been increased to 28 inches and the bag limit reduced to one effective May 3, 2003.

Walworth County – A 14 – 18 inch protected slot limit with only one fish longer than 18 inches allowed has been established with a daily bag limit of three in total for bass on Lulu Lake.

Waukesha County – A 14 – 18 inch protected slot limit with only one fish longer than 18 inches allowed has been established with a daily bag limit of three in total for bass on Eagle Spring Lake.

Panfish management strategy pays off in Ashland/Iron counties

By Jeff Roth, senior fisheries biologist, Mercer

Over the past five years the Mercer fish management staff has concentrated on improving the panfish fishery on several Ashland and Iron county waters. Catchable-size panfish populations are rare in these infertile, dark-stained waters; they inherently support limited natural vegetation or fish cover and/or have "developed" shorelines. All of these fish communities are dominated by walleyes, the most efficient natural predator on panfish populations.

Beginning in 1997, in concert with local lake associations, we embarked on an intensive management program to try to improve panfishing opportunities by removing bluegill and pumpkinseeds from waters with stunted populations. All fish 6 inches or less captured during netting are removed to "thin" the population in "donor" lakes in hope of improving panfish size structure.

The fish are stocked in waters with very low panfish populations. These recipient waters are deficient in hiding cover and have ongoing improvement projects aimed at enhancing such habitat and intensively managing it. Local lake associations and DNR fisheries staff get together annually to install numerous fish cribs in open water areas lacking in cover. Restrictions on harvest of stocked panfish are also very important. All of the recipient waters have special panfish regulations in place.

Early results of this management strategy have shown dramatic improvements in panfish abundance and size structure in the recipient waters, with bluegill up to 10 inches reported. Improvements in size structure of the donor lake populations as a result of "thinning" has not been as successful, with only minor increases in average size and growth rates. This intensive management requires a lot of work and cooperation from many parties, and is most likely most applicable to small waters where the efforts can have a maximum impact.

Future plans include continuing this management program, which lake groups help support financially. Changes in strategy may increase removal rates and enhance gamefish stocking to promote donor lake improvements. Monitoring of the fish community response in the recipient waters will add to our understanding of population dynamics and the validity of this technique as a management tool.

#

Fiscal Year 2001-2002 Wisconsin DNR Production Summary DNR Hatcheries, Ponds, and Coop Ponds

| Species | Total Fish Stocked | Small Fingerling | Large Fingerling | Yearling | Adult Broodstock |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| BROOK TROUT | 460,056 | 110,478 | 136,706 | 211,833 | 1,039 |
| BROWN TROUT | 2,300,522 | 412,591 | 990,290 | 890,624 | 7,017 |
| CHINOOK SALMON | 1,799,386 | 1,799,386 | | | |
| COHO SALMON | 479,845 | | 122,355 | 357,490 | |
| HYBRID MUSKELLUNGE | 25,979 | 13,459 | 12,300 | 220 | |
| LAKE STURGEON | 23,298 | 2,861 | 20,287 | 150 | |
| LAKE TROUT | 133,479 | 30,105 | 89,724 | 13,650 | |
| LARGEMOUTH BASS | 223,382 | | 223,382 | | |
| MUSKELLUNGE | 155,046 | 1,162 | 150,954 | 441 | |
| NORTHERN PIKE | 149,600 | 113,112 | 36,488 | | |
| RAINBOW TROUT | 983,442 | 72,957 | 447,553 | 461,336 | 1,596 |
| SMALLMOUTH BASS | 24 | | 24 | | |
| SPLAKE | 138,209 | | 138,209 | | |
| WALLEYE | 4,382,624 | 4,245,192 | 137,432 | | |
| Statewide | 11,254,892 | 6,801,303 | 2,505,704 | 1,935,744 | 9,652 |

Follow fish consumption advisories to reduce exposure to mercury, PCBs

Although fish are delicious and nutritious, some contain contaminants at levels that can pose health risks to people who eat fish frequently. To reduce your exposure to these contaminants, the state issues advice to help you plan what fish to keep as well as how often and how much fish to eat. Please read the information below and consult the complete fish consumption advisory, **“Choose Wisely - a health guide for eating fish in Wisconsin: 2002.”** It can be found online at www.fishingwisconsin.org, then look under “Wisconsin Fish,” and “Consumption Advice.”

PCB advisory: Forty-nine waters carry polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) advisories for fish and are listed in “Choose Wisely.” The contaminant is most often associated with industrialized river systems and the Great Lakes. PCBs are generally stored in the fat of fish so you can reduce PCB levels in fish you eat by trimming away the fatty areas and properly cooking your fish. You can also choose to fish for less fatty species or smaller legal-sized fish. If a species is not listed for a particular waterbody, then follow the statewide mercury advisory.

Statewide mercury advisory: Mercury is found in almost all waters throughout the state, and mercury levels cannot be reduced by trimming away fat. Wisconsin’s statewide advice for most of Wisconsin’s inland waters recommends that:

Women of childbearing years, nursing mothers and all children under 15, may eat:

- One meal per week of panfish such as bluegill, sunfish, black crappie, white crappie, yellow perch or bullheads AND
- One meal per month of walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish, white sucker, drum, burbot, sauger, sturgeon, carp, white bass, rock bass or other species.
- People in this sensitive group are advised to not eat musky.

Men, and women beyond their childbearing years may eat:

- Unlimited amounts of panfish AND
- One meal per week of walleye, northern pike, smallmouth and largemouth bass, channel and flathead catfish, white sucker, drum, burbot, sauger, sturgeon, carp, white bass, rock bass and other species.

In addition, 92 waterbodies carry more protective consumption advice for reducing mercury exposure. The list of waters is found in “Choose Wisely.”

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Research revealing harmful effects of shoreline development on fish

Bass and forage fish growth rates slow, nest sites influenced

By Lisa Gaumnitz, public affairs manager

Science is now confirming in Vilas County what anglers have long bet their lures on: natural shorelines covered in downed and dead trees make for bigger bass and more abundant perch.

University of Wisconsin-Madison researcher Greg Sass and colleagues are continuing their study to examine how Little Rock Lake fish and other components of the food web react when all of the coarse woody habitat is removed from the shoreline, similar to what typically happens when people develop homes and other recreational properties along lakes and “clean up” their shorelines.

The researchers took advantage of a neoprene curtain that had been added to Little Rock Lake in 1981 to divide the lake in two for lake acidification studies. They removed all of the coarse woody habitat from the shallow water and the shoreline on one half of the lake, finishing in summer 2002. They left the other half alone.

“We examined the responses of fishes to coarse woody habitat removal in growth, distribution, predator-prey interactions, and spawning behavior,” says Sass, a researcher with the UW Center of Limnology. “Our preliminary results include a decrease in growth rates of the top predator, largemouth bass, and the primary forage fish, yellow perch.”

Before the habitat was removed, it provided ample distance and refuge places for prey like the yellow perch, Sass says. After the habitat removal, the perch inhabited only very shallow inshore habitats and the bass moved to the open water, Sass said.

The researchers also found that largemouth bass spawning behavior had a direct relationship to the amount of coarse woody habitat; the density of nests was much greater in areas with intact habitat.

“Overall, our preliminary results indicate that removing coarse woody habitat leads to increased vulnerability of forage fishes, subsequent decline in their populations, and a consequent increase in terrestrial prey in bass diets,” Sass says.

The research results allow scientists a method for predicting the impact on a lake’s food web when differing amounts of woody habitat are removed, mimicking greater or lesser degrees of shoreline development.

Sass plans to reverse the process on Camp Lake in Vilas County in spring 2003; he will add coarse woody habitat to this undeveloped lake, which now lacks substantial habitat.

Track and weigh in on Wisconsin’s efforts to update shoreland standards to better protect fishing, water quality and scenic natural beauty from the effects of overdevelopment. Visit <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>, then use the drop down topic menu and select “Shoreland Management.” Or ask to be placed on an e-mail or hard copy list of people to receive information. Contact Toni Herkert at Toni.Herkert@dnr.state.wi.us or (608) 266-0161.

DNR Regional Fishing Forecasts

Northern Region

The 18 northernmost counties in Wisconsin are poised to provide plenty of quality angling experiences for the 2003 season. Protection and improvement of habitat on many miles of trout streams in the region through beaver control and habitat restoration projects over the past year have made an already good resource even better. Bass fisheries, both smallmouth and largemouth, are really doing well in the region and have seen significant gains over the past decade. This is the heart of musky and walleye country. Many of our best fisheries for these species are supported entirely by natural reproduction, but we do need to stock in some waters. We have embarked upon major efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our stocking programs for both species. Read on for forecasts on a more local note. - *Steve AveLllemant, fish expert, Northern Region*

Lake Superior

The spring trolling fishery starts up as soon as the ice melts. Trout and salmon provide the most action and are usually caught trolling with surface lures. Starting in 2003, the 15-inch minimum size limit has been eliminated for all salmon. This new regulation will allow anglers to keep small coho and chinook salmon caught during the spring fishery. Anglers also can catch brown trout and splake while trolling. Steelhead fishing on tributaries has improved dramatically since implementation of the 26-inch minimum size limit.

Anglers should find plenty of action on area streams. Anglers fishing Chequamegon Bay will find plenty of action for walleye, northern pike and smallmouth bass. Larger fish are available to the angler due to conservative regulations that have been in place for several years. This fishery takes place in relatively protected waters and doesn't require a large boat.

Summer is the best time to troll for lake trout. Based on our creel survey, the average lake trout caught by anglers averages 22 inches. Wild lake trout made up 83 percent of the harvest last year, indicating continued increases in natural reproduction and successful sea lamprey control programs. Wild spawning lake trout continue to increase in abundance at Gull Island Shoal, a fish refuge established in 1976. Abundance of spawning lake trout at Devils Island Shoal increased dramatically following an egg seeding experiment using fertilized lake trout eggs placed in astro-turf bundles.

If you don't own a boat large enough for Lake Superior waters, contact one of several charter captains. Their success rate at catching lake trout is much higher than the average angler's. Wind and water temperatures change daily and will impact fish activity, so check with local sport shops to get the latest conditions.

As water temperatures start to cool down in the fall, trolling action off river mouths for trout and salmon heats up. Brown trout, chinook and coho salmon begin entering rivers at this time. Walleye and smallmouth bass action is still productive in Chequamegon Bay. - *Stephen Schram, fisheries supervisor, Bayfield*

Bayfield and Douglas counties

Bayfield and Douglas counties contain many beautiful lakes and streams that support some outstanding fish communities. Good musky action can be found in northern Douglas County and the large lakes of Bayfield County. A survey was started on Namekagon Lake in 2002 and showed strong populations of walleye, musky, large and smallmouth bass, northern pike and panfish. Namekagon Lake has a 50-inch length limit on musky and there is no length limit on walleye, but only one fish over 14 inches is allowed. Many other lakes in these two counties also have good walleye, largemouth bass and northern pike fisheries. Panfish species also have a home in this area and can be found by anglers in good numbers and size ranges.

Managed trout lakes and spring ponds provide a great opportunity for trout angling. Some of these waters are stocked annually and open every year while others are stocked and open for fishing every other year. Make sure you check the trout regulations for a listing of when they are open. These lakes include Anderson Lake in Douglas County and Bearsdale Springs, Beaver Lake, Johnson Springs, Little Star Lake, Mimi Lake, Nymphia Lake, Overby Lake, Perch Lake, Spring Lake and Wanoka Lake in Bayfield County.

Bayfield County also supports an exceptional inland stream trout fishery for both brook and brown trout, with opportunities for trophy-sized fish. Several surveys were completed in 2002 that showed healthy populations of both brown and brook trout with good size structures.— *Scott Toshner, fisheries biologist, Brule*

Burnett County

Based on initial survey results, five small offshore walleye spawning reefs installed in 2001 on Middle McKenzie Lake, Burnett County, contributed to natural reproduction. The habitat project was a joint effort with the McKenzie Lakes Association to restore the native walleye population. Although the natural fingerling counts are still very low, fall fingerlings averaged 7.8 inches long. That's a good inch more than typical for northern Wisconsin lakes. Large size fingerlings are characteristic of the native walleye strain in this system. - *Larry Damman, fisheries biologist, Spooner*

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Forest, Florence, Lincoln, Oneida, Langlade, some Vilas counties

The area experienced a “typical” winter this past season, so lakes and creeks should be at normal levels. Since panfish is open year around on the area lakes, the “early trout season” will be your first opportunity at trying for gamefish. Be advised that this is catch and release, and all trout water in the basin is not open to the “early season.” Please consult the 2003-2004 Trout Regulations Guide for details. Ice-out on area lakes will occur anywhere from mid- to late-April this year, so anglers should expect to find panfish seeking warmer bays and channels prior to the opening of the general gamefish season.

Fishing in general should be good for 2003. Reports from local guides are positive and they have been particularly happy with walleye and musky fishing over the past year. Musky fishing on a few key waters could be enhanced by instituting “quality regulations.” A committee made up of local guides, Conservation Congress members, resort owners, and DNR fisheries staff have been working together to explore raising the minimum size limit for musky to 50 inches on these key waters. Good recruitment of largemouth and smallmouth bass in recent years has resulted in excellent fishing for these species. Panfish opportunities abound in this area as well, so one should have no problem finding these species as they head out to area waters.

Fall 2002 electrofishing surveys showed fair to good year classes of walleye produced on lakes having natural reproduction. Such natural reproduction lakes account for the majority of waters in the DNR geographic management unit known as the Headwaters Basin. On average, anglers catch three times more walleye while fishing lakes maintained entirely by natural reproduction. In lakes where walleye are maintained entirely through stocking, survey crews found very little survival. Last spring these lakes were stocked with fingerling walleye that were marked with a fluorescent dye so that biologists could distinguish hatchery fish from any that may have resulted from natural reproduction. In most cases, we found only a handful of fingerlings that survived in these stocked-only waters. Walleye stocking appears to be most beneficial in lakes where a combination of natural reproduction and stocking occur. Evaluations of this type will continue in the future to help biologists stock where it is most beneficial.

Many surveys and habitat projects were also conducted on area trout waters, with some work done in cooperation with Trout Unlimited. DNR fisheries crews used electrofishing equipment to survey fish populations along segments of streams on many of the Oneida, Vilas, Forest, Florence, Lincoln, and Langlade county streams. Generally speaking, the trout fisheries in all of the area streams appear to be doing well. Population estimates on several of the streams indicated a stable number of fish compared to past years, with a few streams showing improved numbers. More than a dozen habitat projects occurred in the basin that will improve trout fishing. To highlight one particular project, DNR crews placed structures in the streams to create 29 pools, three runs and 27 riffles. In addition, the crews placed 187 boulders and 170 whole cover logs to create refuge for trout. Spring pond dredging has continued to be an effective tool in applicable waters, restoring brook and brown trout spawning habitat and providing refuge areas. A dam removal also occurred this year that will provide cooler water in a tributary to the Popple River. An inland lake trout plan also has been developed to ensure these native strains continue to thrive. The plan will include the propagation and stocking of Trout Lake (Vilas County) strain lake trout in Clear Lake and Big Carr Lake in Oneida County. Eggs will be manually taken from a sample of Trout Lake fish by the Art Oehmcke Hatchery staff and reared into fingerlings, after which they will be stocked into the “brood” lakes. This will ensure the unique inland strain will be available in other water sources. – *Mike Vogelsang, fisheries supervisor, Woodruff*

Polk County

With cooperation from landowners, DNR crews installed a walleye spawning reef on Ward Lake in Polk County in response to declining walleye recruitment. Follow up surveys will evaluate effectiveness of this habitat enhancement.

Long-time fisheries biologist Richard Cornelius retired in 2002. Rick pioneered aeration systems in this part of the state. His cost-effective techniques made it practical for local units of government, lake associations, sportsman groups and individuals to take on the responsibility of operating lake aerators to prevent winter fish kill. As a result, 14 lakes totaling almost 3,000 acres of public water in these counties have stable productive fisheries where no fish, or just boom and bust populations, existed before. - *Larry Damman, fisheries biologist, Spooner*

Price, Taylor, and southern Rusk counties

DNR fishery surveys over the past few years have shown some excellent smallmouth and largemouth bass populations in many waters in these “north central” counties of the DNR geographic management unit known as the Upper Chippewa Basin. In more than 30 years of looking at these lakes and rivers, I can’t remember a time when we’ve had such good bass fishing across the board. River smallmouth and lake/flowage largemouth bass fishing should be excellent in 2003 on the heels of four to five years of very high natural spawning success.

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The 2002 year class of bass was also good and that should keep the run going for an even longer time. Many anglers have been rediscovering some great river smallmouth fishing on the forks of the Flambeau and Jump rivers that run through these counties as well as a few other medium-sized rivers: the Yellow and Black rivers in Taylor County and Chippewa in Rusk County.

In 2003, work will continue with a Trout Stamp-funded improvement project on the South Fork Main Creek in Rusk County. This wild brook trout stream in the central part of the county has been worked on by DNR crews for several years. As a State Fishery Area, it offers improved access through landowner easements along much of its length.

Speaking of trout stream fishing, DNR fishery and land agents have just recently completed some nice additions to the Big Rib River Fishery Area in Taylor County. An outright purchase of one parcel and a fishing easement on an adjoining piece will give trout anglers even better access to the best stream in the county.

Even though the walleye hatch of 2002 was mediocre at best in many of the area's lakes, some great hatching success and a strong stocking program in the recent past should make for high success rates for walleye anglers come May 2003. Musky tournament anglers on a number of waters reported excellent catches of this State Fish in 2002, and being catch-and-release events, those same fish will be back and even bigger in 2003! - *Jim Lealos, senior fisheries biologist, Park Falls*

Northern Rusk and Sawyer counties

The two big continuing trends in these waters are increases in numbers and size of smallmouth bass and trophy-sized (50+ inches) muskellunge. For excellent smallmouth try Round, Connors and Grindstone lakes in Sawyer County, plus the Flambeau and Chippewa rivers in both counties. A few of the hot trophy muskellunge lakes include Lac Courte Oreilles (50-inch minimum size limit), Chippewa Flowage (45-inch minimum size), and Dairyland Reservoir, with a 40-inch minimum size.

There is no clear trend for walleye. Their populations are up, down, or stable depending on the water. A few "up" waters include Round, Chetac, and Grindstone lakes. One of the "down" lakes is Sand Lake in Sawyer County. On this water, we have embarked on a crash stocking program, coupled with a 28-inch minimum size to preserve spawning stock. The stocking of large fingerling walleyes is being used to improve panfish populations on Black Dan and Island Lakes in the Winter area of Sawyer County. As a result these lakes also have a 28-inch minimum limit.

Bluegill and crappie size structure is improving on those waters where a 10 bag is now in place, most notably Nelson and Chetac in Sawyer County. Look to these two for the opportunity to catch really large gills in the near future. Historically, both produced trophy panfish before overharvest took its toll.

Wild brook trout seem to be mounting a comeback in the Blue Hills streams (Devils Creek, Weirgord system). The Namekagon remains one of the best wild, trophy brown trout streams in the East. (Brook trout are also increasing in some reaches of the Namekagon). DNR and the U.S. Park Service will embark on a major habitat restoration project on Schultz Springs/Cap Creek in summer 2003. This is major brook trout nursery area for the upper Namekagon. Management trends for stream trout have shifted to a greater emphasis on wild strain management.

The stocked trout-only lakes continue to provide good fishing, and an occasional large hold-over, too. Some of the better trout-only lakes in this region include Camp Smith Lake in Sawyer County and Three Lakes in the Blue Hills region of Rusk County. Two-story management is very successful in Ashagon Lake near Couderay in Sawyer County. This unique lake provides opportunity for five trout species, as well as bass, walleye, and panfish! We have started experimental two-story management on Round Lake, too. (Stay tuned - there is a good chance that this one could hit big for browns and/or rainbows.) - *Frank Pratt, senior fisheries biologist, Hayward*

Washburn County

Fourteen new trout lakes await anglers on public land in the Washburn County Forest. It's not the usual put-and-take deal. Two-inch long fingerling brook and rainbow trout are stocked in April. Growth is excellent and by September they reach a nice pan size of 7 to 10 inches. Since catchable size trout are most abundant in fall, the lakes have an extended fishing season. However, you won't find them listed in the regulation booklet. Most don't even have an official name. A new base regulation, unique to Washburn County, allows trout fishing through March 1 on these lakes which have no outlet streams. To find these backwoods jewels, check www.co.washburn.wi.us/departments/forestry/ for links to specific lake information and trail maps. Some of these small lakes are just a stone's throw from the road while others may require as much as a 2-mile hike. - *Larry Damman, fisheries biologist, Spooner*

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Northeast Region

The Northeast Region of Wisconsin provides diverse, high quality and abundant angling opportunities. Region waters include a large portion of Lake Michigan; Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin's largest inland lake; Big Green Lake, Wisconsin's deepest inland lake; 1,000 small lakes; several large river systems including the Fox, Wolf, Oconto, Peshtigo and Menominee rivers; and more than 2,000 miles of trout streams.

Door County

Lake Michigan and Green Bay, including tributary streams - Nearly 4.5 million trout and salmon are stocked in the Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan and Green Bay each year. The Lake Michigan trout and salmon fishery off Door County was better than usual in 2002 and included a mixed bag of steelhead, brown and lake trout, coho and chinook salmon. Chinook fishing was exceptional. The chinook fishery started early and continued strong throughout the summer. Fishing even improved considerably around the northern tip of the county, including Washington Island. The chinook fishery of 2002 will be a tough act to follow, but anglers are hopeful for a repeat performance. The chinook program on Lake Michigan has recovered from the Bacterial Kidney Disease problems that devastated the fishery a decade ago.

During fall 2002, a record 11,000 chinook were harvested at the Strawberry Creek weir near Sturgeon Bay, providing all the eggs needed for Wisconsin's Lake Michigan and Lake Superior chinook fishery programs. The salmon harvest and egg collection effort continues to benefit from a 3/4-mile long pipeline installed by state fisheries crews in 2000. The pipeline delivers 1,500 gallons of water per minute to supplement the flow of Strawberry Creek. This assures that in coming years the Lake Michigan chinook salmon program will not be in jeopardy due to low flow and low water levels.

Smallmouth bass populations along the Door County shoreline remain strong and should provide exciting fishing in 2003. The strong 1995 year class of bass will continue to provide abundant fish in excess of 18 inches. Trophy-sized fish above 20 inches from older year classes are not uncommon. Fishing for northern pike should continue to provide action for both open water and ice fishermen.

About 2000 Great Lakes spotted musky were stocked for the first time in Sturgeon Bay in 2002. The stocking was part of the decade-long effort to re-establish reproducing populations of this native species in Green Bay. Bragging-size muskies have already been reported caught in Green Bay in recent years, adding to the already sizable mixed bag of sport fish available in the Lake Michigan and Green Bay waters around Door County.

Lake Michigan and Green Bay water levels recovered slightly but remained below average in 2002. Current projections by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are for the lake level to remain below average throughout 2003. Many of the smaller boat launch access points will probably be unusable again this coming summer. In Door County, this could include access points like Shauer Park, Whitefish Bay ramp, and Murphy Park. Others along the Lake Michigan coast also will be unusable. Anglers planning to fish the lakeshore are advised to check with local municipalities before going to a particular launch. Many structures that were normally just below the water surface of Lake Michigan and Green Bay are now exposed and areas that were safe to transit in the past may have new obstructions lurking just below the surface. Lake Michigan and Green Bay boaters are advised to use caution when navigating unfamiliar waters.

The low lake and bay levels also affect access of trout and salmon into Door County's tributary streams. Whitefish Bay and Heins creeks are stocked annually with steelhead. Runs of adult steelhead and other trout and salmon into these and other Door County tributary streams in spring and fall depend heavily on the amount of runoff from snow-melt and rain. Call the Sturgeon Bay DNR Service Center (920) 746-2860 before making the trip to get the latest information on fish runs and current stream conditions in Door County.

- *Paul Peeters, fisheries biologist, and Mike Toney, fisheries supervisor, Sturgeon Bay*

Fond du Lac County

Long Lake - Near Dundee, this is the lake of choice in eastern Fond du Lac County. The lake provides many opportunities for most of the common warmwater fish. Long Lake has a very good population of nice sized largemouth bass as well as a healthy panfish population. Walleye action also can be good due to the stocking efforts of the Long Lake Fishing Club and DNR. - *John E. Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

Green Lake County

Big Green Lake - Wisconsin's deepest inland lake provides unique fishing for both warm and cold water species. One of only three inland lakes to hold lake trout, this unique fishery has provided outstanding action for generations. Native cisco populations are doing well and provide a great addition to the cold water fishery, particularly in the fall and winter. Warm water species such as northern pike, large and smallmouth bass, walleye, white bass and panfish are all native to this lake and provide excellent fishing at many times during the year.

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Lake Puckaway - This lake, including the Fox River, continues to provide anglers with plenty of action for northern pike and walleye. This high-density pike population, which contains many fish in the high-20 to low 30-inch range, is the result of the 32-inch size limit with a bag of one. Real opportunity exists for high catch rates and a possible trophy. Walleye are available most of the year in the Fox River system with the best action occurring in the spring and fall. The Fox River also has tremendous catfishing for both channel and flathead species. - *Dave Bartz, fisheries biologist, Montello*

Kewaunee and Manitowoc counties

Lake Michigan waters - Anglers in 2003 should again enjoy good success in catching Lake Michigan trout and salmon from local ports. Chinook fishing was excellent in 2002 with many large fish caught and this trend is likely to continue this year. Steelhead and brown trout angling should be similar to the past year with very good action when favorable wind patterns develop.

Lake Michigan tributary streams - It is likely that low water conditions in tributaries will result in a slow spring steelhead run in 2003. Heavy fall rains or winter snow may result in a stronger run. However, if conditions are poor with low flows, the best bets for steelhead action will be in the larger tributaries. Northern pike runs should be good in the Manitowoc and Twin rivers. Sucker runs should also be good, although low water may reduce the number of these fish entering streams. Smelt runs will continue to be very poor because of a very low lakewide population. It is likely the fall run of chinook salmon in 2003 will be smaller than the record return seen in 2002 but should still provide anglers many opportunities to catch these large fish. - *Steve Hogler, fisheries biologist, Mishicot*

Kewaunee, Manitowoc and Calumet county inland lakes and rivers

A variety of fishing opportunities exist in these counties. Each county has one inland lake stocked with rainbow trout (Krohns Lake, Kewaunee, Round Lake, Calumet and Horseshoe Lake, Manitowoc) with an open season that runs from the first Saturday in May through March 1. Other inland trout opportunities exist in Scarboro Creek, in the East and West Twin rivers, and in several of their tributaries that are stocked with brown trout. An inland trout stamp is required for lakes and inland streams when fishing for trout. Other fishing opportunities on the inland lakes include black crappie and bluegill, which are always a good bet early in the season, with largemouth bass fishing improving later in the summer. - *Steve Hogler, fisheries biologist, Mishicot*

Marinette and Oconto counties

Green Bay waters - Three public workshops were held during 2002 to discuss issues related to the yellow perch decline in Green Bay waters. Recommendations from those sessions will be worked on during 2003 and include the formation of a Green Bay Fisheries Research Team. Anglers are reminded that the 10-bag limit remains in effect for yellow perch in Green Bay waters. This regulation will provide protection to the spawning population and improve the chances for recruitment of young perch to the population. Surveys during 2002 showed a slight increase in the number of young yellow perch entering the population compared to the past decade, although not as good as the 1998 year class. The fishery, both commercial and sport, is still relying heavily on the 1998 year class, which is the only good year class produced since the late 1980s.

Fishing for brown trout and splake has been consistent and is expected to continue in 2003. In July 2002 the new state record splake was caught in Green Bay just south of Marinette. The fish weighed in at a whopping 17.9 pounds and a length of 32 inches.

The 2002 fall run of chinook and coho salmon to the Oconto, Peshtigo and Menominee rivers was helped by improved water depth and flow, due to above normal precipitation. We expect good spring and fall runs of trout and salmon in 2003 if water levels increase or remain the same as in 2002.

Anglers report catching and releasing spotted musky greater than 40 inches in length from the Menominee, lower Fox and other areas of the bay. These are the result of a stocking program initiated in the late 1980s with the help of local musky clubs to reintroduce the native musky species to Green Bay. Effective April 1, 2003, there is a regulation change on muskies in Green Bay waters and its tributaries (excluding the Menominee River); the new minimum length limit will increase to 50 inches.

A white perch contaminant study that started in 2001 was completed during 2002. This study showed that the average concentration of PCBs in white perch was at 0.77 parts per million, which is lower than past samples which exceeded the 2 parts per million level. In 2002, the regulation for sport harvest of white perch in Green Bay was changed from cannot keep to an open year-round season with no daily bag limit or minimum size. - *Justine Hasz, fisheries biologist, Peshtigo*

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Marinette and Oconto county lakes and streams

Caldron and High Falls flowages on the Peshtigo River are expected to provide good muskie fishing, with the potential to provide a trophy or two. Northern pike populations on the flowages are also in good shape and can provide anglers with an exciting fishing experience. Large and smallmouth bass populations remain in good condition and will also provide anglers with hours of enjoyable fishing on some very scenic waters. Bluegill and black crappie on Lake Noquebay provide anglers with good catches of quality-sized fish. Lake Noquebay also supports good populations of largemouth bass, northern pike and smaller populations of walleye and muskie, that offer lake anglers a diverse and challenging fishing experience. Northeastern Wisconsin has numerous small lakes that support good populations of northern pike, largemouth bass and an assortment of panfish. The area is also well known for the miles of quality trout water which attract the adventurous angler. Trout anglers are reminded to carefully look over the Trout Regulation pamphlet this year. There have been a number of changes including the base trout regulation for Marinette County streams. The base regulation is now a 7-inch minimum size with a five fish bag limit. This is the same base regulation as Oconto County and has been in place for several years. There are a few streams with higher size limits and lower bag limits to provide the angler with a chance to catch larger trout, so check the 2003 Trout Regulations Guide before fishing. Beaver control and dam removal on trout streams by DNR crews continues to protect the excellent trout habitat in this area. Habitat protection, combined with the fishing regulations, provide the trout enthusiast with a variety of opportunities, from the chance to catch a meal of trout to an enjoyable catch and release experience. - *Russ Heizer, fisheries biologist, Peshtigo*

Marquette County

Marquette County contains a variety of small "pot hole" lakes with excellent largemouth bass and panfish populations. Most contain adequate access, from improved boat landings, to unimproved carry in access. Take your pick to have the fishing experience of your choice. Marquette County is also home to some of Wisconsin's finest trout water. Acres of state ownership allow easy access to a number of class I and class II waters. Native brook, brown and rainbow trout populations combined with a variety of regulations provide action for any type of trout angler. - *Dave Bartz, fisheries biologist, Montello*

Shawano County lakes and streams

Shawano Lake will continue to provide excellent largemouth bass and panfish angling opportunities this year. In addition, good numbers of walleye are still present from the large 1998 year class and will provide harvest opportunities this summer. Shawano County trout streams had normal to above normal flows due to recharging of the groundwater during 2002. This should benefit trout populations in 2003. Catfishing in the Wolf River was slow in 2002 due to colder temperatures and higher flows in May and June, however, look for better opportunities in 2003. - *Ross Langhurst, fisheries biologist, Shawano*

Waushara and Waupaca county lakes and streams

Numerous opportunities are available for catching native brown and brook trout. Unique populations of rainbow trout also exist in Chaffee, Mecan and White stream systems. Miles of state ownership along some of Wisconsin's best trout streams provide for ample public access to a number of different waters. Ongoing habitat improvement funded by Trout Stamp sales and land acquisition are constantly improving this already outstanding fishery. Specific regulations apply to individual waters and provide for a variety of trout fishing opportunities. Recent trout stream surveys have shown excellent size structure and abundance. Small lakes in the area, including the Waupaca chain, will provide largemouth bass, bluegill, yellow perch and crappie action similar to the past. Abundant numbers of northern pike on White Lake in Waupaca County could provide excellent action in 2003 with harvest of fish less than 24 inches encouraged. Trophy-sized pike are also present in some of the mill ponds – *Scott Bunde, fisheries technician, Wautoma*

Winnebago System

Lakes Winnebago, Poygan, Butte des Morts and Winneconne - Despite low water flows, poor to no water levels on the spawning marshes, and rapidly fluctuating water temperatures, walleye in the Winnebago system were able to pull off an average year class last spring. Despite the poor spawning conditions, DNR and volunteer crews were able to capture, tag and collect data on a total of 1,642 walleye from the system during last spring's spawning run. Males ranged in size from 13 to 22 inches, with an average size of 16.9 inches and 1.8 pounds. Females ran from 15.5 to 26.5 inches with an average of 20.7 inches and 4.2 pounds.

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The bulk of the males lie in the "medium" range (15 to 18 inches), with about 15 percent of them over 18 inches. Females were not as tightly bunched, with about two-thirds of them under 21 inches, and one-third over that. These medium-sized females are mostly fish from the 1996 year class. That year-class is the dominant one in the lake right now. These will be joined in two to three years by the huge 2001 year class, which will be another major contributor to the walleye stock.

All things considered, the walleye population in the Winnebago system is in excellent shape and getting even better! Anglers can again expect good numbers of medium-sized walleye in the rivers during the spring run and out in the lakes in early summer. One look at the tournament catches from 2002 confirms this. The average length of more than 1,300 walleye measured by DNR personnel at June tournaments last year was 19 inches! And while less abundant, large walleye (greater than 24 inches) are still regularly caught, offering anglers chances for a "wall hanger."

These good growth rates should continue, as index trawling from August 2002 again showed a plentiful food base. "Too plentiful!" as some anglers have grouched when mid-summer arrives. The average number of trout perch, or "grounders" as they are locally known, was down slightly in 2002 over the previous two years, but was still the third highest catch recorded in 17 years of sampling.

Bass

Largemouth and smallmouth bass fishing continues to be good throughout the system as well. Bass anglers reported catching 2,800 bass during permitted tournaments in 2002. During an early June tournament, largemouth ranged from 14 to 19.3 inches, and smallmouth ran up to 18.8 inches. The majority of the largemouth are smaller, with about 75 percent under 16 inches. Bigger fish are present but in small numbers at this time. Only about 2 percent of the largemouth were over 18 inches. Regardless, good numbers of smaller fish should keep bass anglers interested. Look for largemouth in the channels and protected bays on the lakes, and in the marshy areas on the lower rivers. Traditional bass baits and methods work well, especially plastics.

Anglers are reminded to maneuver gently around all vegetation on the system, as it is a valuable and scarce habitat. Smallmouth are more common in the upper rivers near faster current and rock or gravel areas. Don't overlook the Little Wolf and Embarrass rivers. Smallies also can be found on the lakes along rock/gravel exposed shorelines or on the offshore reefs, especially on Winnebago. Work a jig tipped with a leech in these areas or troll the edge of the reefs with a crankbait. Both are productive methods. The best part is you're just as likely to hook a walleye in these areas - sort of "two for the price of one" fishing!

Northern pike

Northern pike numbers remain good on the system, although numbers of large fish (greater than 30 inches) are still not increasing to what we feel they could be. Two areas were fyke netted in the spring of 2002 to further assess our northern pike populations: Pages Slough off Lake Poygan and Partridge Lake on the Wolf River in Fremont. Both are good northern areas, especially for spawning. Between the two areas, more than 950 northern were netted during their spawning run.

It was estimated that 1,400 northern pike use Pages Slough for spawning and that roughly 6,000 use the Partridge Lake area! The fish ranged in size from 9 to 40 inches. Females averaged 23.4 inches and 25.1 inches in Pages and Partridge, respectively. In Pages, 28 percent of the females were at or over 26 inches, the legal minimum length on the system. That same number was almost 40 percent in Partridge. Among males however, less than 4 percent exceeded 26 inches. We feel that the reduced bag limit of two per day has done much to rebuild the number of northern pike in the system but are concerned that the minimum size limit is forcing anglers to crop off the bigger individuals, especially females, preventing the average size from increasing. Efforts will continue to evaluate what rules would be best for northern pike on the Winnebago system. Anglers are reminded to please promptly report any tagged fish to the nearest DNR office.

Panfish

Finally, anglers pursuing palatable panfish continue to be pleasantly surprised on the Winnebago system. Bluegill and perch have both responded well to the increase of rooted aquatic vegetation in areas around the system. Evidence of this is the 800-plus bluegill and 500 black crappie netted in Partridge Lake during northern pike spawning assessment in 2002. Bluegill ranged from 4 to 9 inches with an average of 6.6 inches. Crappie ranged from 4 to 14 inches, with an average of 10.2 inches. Yellow perch had another good hatch in Lake Winnebago in 2002 for the second year in a row. It was the third highest average catch-per-effort of fingerling perch in 17 years of sampling; the highest ever was recorded in 2001. So for perch anglers, things are pretty good and looking even better for the future. - *Kendall Kamke, senior fisheries biologist, Oshkosh*

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South Central Region

Columbia County

Crystal Lake - Located on the border of Dane and Columbia counties, this 527-acre, shallow, eutrophic seepage lake has become known as a premier bluegill factory. The 2002 angling season noted good ice fishing for bluegill, which had usually not been the case. This was followed by rather poor spring/summer success due to heavy plant growth. As a result, anglers in 2003 should find even higher numbers of bluegill. An extremely high density of largemouth bass under the 14 inch size limit help control the bluegill population, thus allowing for higher than average growth. A study in 1999 found there to be 187,000 bluegill over 5.5 inches present in April, with harvest of 91,000 during May and June. Harvest was comprised of 25 percent of fish over 7 inches, with 5 percent over 8 inches. The heavy harvest makes room for greater production.

Lake Wisconsin / Wisconsin River - Annual DNR monitoring of the walleye and sauger year classes found higher-than-average walleye reproduction this year – the best year class observed since 1997. Sauger recruitment is typically more stable, though it was down significantly in 2002. A protective, no harvest 20-28 inch slot size limit for both walleye and sauger became effective in 2002 upstream from the Prairie du Sac dam. Anglers were definitely releasing 20+-inch walleye this year from three years of high reproduction in the mid-1990s. Time will tell whether this regulation, which anglers requested, is working. A minimum size limit of 15 inches exists on walleye and sauger. The lake is open year round for all species, except musky and lake sturgeon. Bluegills on the lake are underfished and excellent growth provides for plentiful 8-inch fish. Smallmouth bass and flathead catfish numbers have been increasing.

Swan Lake - The 406-acre lake is a natural widening of the Fox River. Stocked walleye and musky are well established with abundant 15- to 18-inch walleye and good numbers of musky, which carry a 40-inch minimum size limit. Help evaluate whether stocking fall fingerlings or spring yearlings results in better fish survival by reporting to DNR the tag number and length of any musky you catch. Gizzard shad provide a plentiful forage base for these predators. Large and smallmouth bass, northern pike, catfish, crappie, bluegill and yellow bass round out this fishery. Bowfin and longnose gar are also abundant predators. – *Dan Fuller, fisheries technician, Poynette*

Dane County

Lake Mendota - Madison's' largest lake was surveyed intensively in 2002. A full-scale comprehensive survey included spring fyke netting for walleye and northern pike, spring electrofishing for population estimation, summer fyke netting for panfish young-of-year, and a late fall electrofishing index run. Spring nets caught 675 northern pike with an average length of 24.4 inches. The largest northern sampled measured 44.4 inches and tipped scales at 23 pounds. Females outnumbered males 339 to 253 with 83 unsexed fish. The average female measured 29.7 inches compared to her average male counterpart at 20.5 inches.

The spring walleye catch was impressive with 4,097 fish captured. The majority of fish were males (3,335) averaging 16.6 inches while the 735 females sampled averaged 21.0 inches. The largest walleye sampled in Mendota was 29.6 inches and weighed 11.6 pounds. Population data calculated from 1998 estimated .25 northern pike per acre and 3.8 walleye per acre in Mendota. Legal walleyes (greater than 18 inches) were determined to number .65/acre. 2002 survey data suggest similar densities of legal fish and better than average abundance of sub-legal fish.

Mendota largemouth and small mouth populations are typically under-sampled by spring methods. However, 2002 largemouth numbers were strong with fish up to 22 inches showing up in nets. Bluegill and crappie populations look promising with strong catches noted and quality-sized fish commonplace. Perch numbers from summer netting show a continuing cooling off from the strong showing of 2000. Catches of both adult and young perch were low in 2002.

Productive areas on Lake Mendota are the University Bay and campus waterfronts for panfish and largemouth bass. Smallmouth fans will find the shores on the east side of the lake from Warner launch to Governors Island productive. Walleye anglers can find good action in spring off the rocky shorelines from second point west towards spring harbor. Once water warms, deep weedlines are consistent producers. Northern fisherman should look for their quarry in spring at stream mouths and off quickly deepening points. Summer fish are harder to find but fall fish are aggressive and bucktails over weeds in areas of good access to deeper water should produce. The Yahara River below Tenney park locks provides excellent white bass and walleye opportunities, especially beneath bridge crossings and on the shoals at the inflow to Monona.

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Lake Monona - Anglers seeking largemouth bass will find plenty along this 3,274-acre lake's northern shore. 2001 and 2002 spring electrofishing runs caught between 55 and 64 fish per hour (all sizes) with legal fish being sampled at between five and nine per hour. Legal fish comprised from 8 to 16 percent of all fish caught. Fall 2002 samples were similar, with catch rates and proportion of legal fish similar to spring runs. The largest bass recently sampled was 21.6 inches and 6 pounds 2 ounces. Pan fish numbers were robust in 2002 and are expected to stay strong. Squaw Bay, Monona Bay, the "triangle" area, and the south shore should be consistent producers. Some nice walleye and pike were sampled by fisheries crews along John Nolen drive and the bridges west of the terrace. Musky can be found frequenting the weed edges along the west shores. Monona fish are robust for their size, with fish in the upper 30s fairly common.

Lakes Waubesa and Kegonsa - Lake Waubesa has excellent opportunity for walleye, panfish, northern pike and musky. Excellent weed edges, rock bars, spring seeps and natural shoreline provide cover for healthy populations. Walleye and northern pike abundances have steadily increased from the mid -1990s with a corresponding increase in average size and proportion of legal fish as well. Kegonsa enjoys similar quality-size structure for walleye and northern pike although the lakes' uniformity of depth makes it difficult to pattern fish. Anglers can expect good action by concentrating their efforts off the lakes' many points and at the inflow and outflow of the Yahara River in the zones where waters mix. Both lakes are very fertile and summer algae quickly reduce water clarity. The "little brother-little sister" companion lakes are Upper and Lower Mud lakes, respectively. These widenings of the Yahara River can be "sleepers," providing quick panfish action as they warm more quickly in spring. Patient anglers who "prospect" weed edges will be rewarded with quality bluegills and the occasional lone walleye or northern.

Lake Wingra - Densities of musky, Wingra's signature fish, remain very high in this 340-acre, slow-no-wake waterbody. Set in the middle of urban Madison, anglers can enjoy fast action from the bank or by small watercraft along what is a largely publicly owned shoreline. Surveys in 2002 caught many quality fish, with many exceeding the 40-inch length limit. Weights to 16.5 pounds were sampled. Panfish are numerous but run small, making Wingra a great location to take beginning anglers. Boat rentals are available on the lake's north shore.

Dane County Trout streams - DNR survey crews sampled 12 Dane County streams at 36 different locations during summer 2002. Trout have responded extremely well to habitat improvement projects. Degraded stream corridors have undergone weed tree removal, shaping and sloping of banks, and placement of underbank structures, which cumulatively improve stream flow and cover. Excellent reproduction of native fish and resurgence of natural brook trout were noted on many systems. Anglers can find plenty of solitude and waiting fish by looking to smaller streams and creeks that have experienced adjacent and upstream set aside of agricultural land. Many streams are under easement by the state, county, or sportman's clubs. Anglers are urged to ask landowners for access and to leave only footprints. Dane County also has four stocked ponds where novice anglers can enjoy catching their first trout. – *Kurt Welke, fisheries biologist, Madison*

Dodge County

Beaver Dam Lake - The severity of winter of 2003 will determine the fate of upcoming fishing on Beaver Dam Lake. Volunteers from the Beaver Dam Lake Improvement Association operate the aeration system on the lake and will be prepared for installation if weather dictates. Crappie fishing continues to be a highlight of fishing, with the majority of fish 10 to 13 inches in length. Angler reports also indicate good bluegill fishing as well. Sightings of large schools of small fish, thought to be carp, during the summer of 2002 prompted a brief shoreline seining survey for young-of-the-year (YOY) fish species. Fortunately, results indicate that the majority of fish sampled were YOY pumpkinseed and bluegill. The large number of small fish of these two species should translate into future panfish fishing opportunities on Beaver Dam Lake.

Lake Emily - Anglers report decent catches of northern pike and largemouth bass through the summer of 2002 and into early fall. Lake Emily should continue its tradition of quality panfish fishing in late spring and early summer of 2003.

Fox Lake -Young-of-year walleye fingerling numbers from fall 2002 boomshocking on Fox Lake were comparable to numbers found in 2001. Overall, walleye fingerling numbers remain low relative to the annual stocking of 130,000 small fingerlings per year. The total number of walleye sampled during fall 2002 sampling doubled to 23.6 per hour, compared to 2001's rate of 11.1 per hour. As in most years, anglers continue to report good crappie fishing, as well as good bluegill fishing, with bluegill averaging 6 to 9 inches. Fall surveys in 2002 produced large numbers of small crappie and bluegill, which should provide continued angling opportunities for panfish in the upcoming years. - *Laura Stremick-Thompson, fisheries biologist, Horicon*

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Jefferson County

Rock Lake - Despite stocking of the larger extended-growth walleye during fall 2001, annual fall boomshocking surveys on Rock Lake in 2002 show low numbers of young-of-year (YOY) and yearling walleye. Results indicate no increase in walleye numbers caught in 2002 compared to 2001. The extended growth walleye stocking was attempted on a trial basis since the walleye fry traditionally stocked into the lake showed very little survival into their first fall. While the walleye population may be struggling, Rock Lake continues to be a producer of decent-sized largemouth and smallmouth bass, with fall survey results showing catch rates comparable to those in 2001. - *Laura Stremick-Thompson, fisheries biologist, Horicon*

Lake Ripley - This lake is a consistent provider of largemouth bass and panfish angling action. There are opportunities for some large northern pike and walleye. The DNR has been finding several year classes of smallmouth bass and this could be the year that the older fish will be of legal size.

Red Cedar Lake and Hope Lake - Both of these smaller lakes are rather shallow and prone to be over grown with aquatic vegetation by mid-summer. But for those who persist and figure out how to overcome the "sea-weed" there are plentiful and at times surprisingly large bass and panfish to be found. There is no public access on Hope Lake, but a private landowner allows access for a modest donation.

Blue Spring Lake, Upper and Lower Spring Lake: These three, smaller lakes harbor good numbers of largemouth bass and panfish. Hold on fast on Blue Spring Lake for it will give up a northern pike on occasion. - *Algis Byla, fisheries biologist, Janesville*

Rock County

Lake Koshkonong and Rock River - For the first time in a number of years, the Indianford dam is fully functional and the operating orders for the winter drawdown are in full compliance. With spring precipitation, the strong current from the Rock River should provide for a good walleye and sauger run. The Indianford dam operating orders shift into the summer mode on May 1, and this means whitebass and channel catfish numbers will be on the rise. Northern pike, bass and walleye will be in the lake, waiting for an opportunity to hit your bait.

Gibbs, Storrs and Clear Lakes - All three of these smaller lakes have good public access for the angler, and are a haven for panfish. At times, aquatic weeds can be a bit of a nuisance, but the persistent angler should have plenty of action with an occasional largemouth bass tugging at your line.

Allen Creek and Spring Creek: These streams located in the northwest corner of the county are category 3 trout streams. Natural reproduction in these waters is limited, but annual stocking keeps the creeks supplied with brown trout. - *Algis Byla, fisheries biologist, Janesville*

Sauk County

Devils Lake - The two-story brown trout fishery continues to grow in popularity. About 20 percent of the catch is comprised of two-year-old trout (14 to 17 inches) that have survived one summer by seeking out a 4-foot layer of oxygenated water just under the thermocline. Stocked at 9 inches in April, they grow to 12 inches the following fall. Open season is from the first Saturday in May until March 1, size limit is 9 inches, daily bag is three and an inland trout stamp is required. Many anglers are enjoying ice fishing for the trout using fathead minnows. The lake touts a trophy northern pike fishery with its 32-inch size limit. Many fish 32 to 42 inches were netted by DNR crews last spring. Largemouth, smallmouth bass and jumbo bluegills also are present. Only electric motors are allowed. This past summer DNR installed a 24-inch siphon to withdraw phosphorus from the bottom of the lake before the lake turned over in the fall. Over 10 to 15 years, the goal is to return the lake to a more pristine state, which will be most noticable to lake users by less filamentous algae and increased water clarity. Slower fish growth will be the likely trade-off.

Dutch Hollow Lake - This is another subdivision development lake in northwest Sauk County that was created by a 42-foot high dam. It has excellent water clarity making fishing hard during the daytime. This is because water leaks from the lake, requiring groundwater pumping to maintain its level. A good walleye fishery is maintained by stocking and the largemouth bass population has increased to that present in the mid-1990s, which will help reduce high numbers of small panfish. The lake has produced state record crappie and bluegill. Two public landings provide boat access.

Lake Delton - This 267-acre lake is created by a dam on Dell Creek and lies between Mirror Lake and the Wisconsin River in the highly developed Wisconsin Dells. The best opportunity to fish is in the spring and fall to avoid heavy use of other recreational water activities. The lake supports an excellent walleye and largemouth bass fishery that seem to concentrate along the south shoreline in the fall. Abundant white crappie and yellow bass provide angling for panfish enthusiasts.

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Lake Redstone - This scenic, 600-acre impoundment in northwest Sauk County continues to provide excellent fishing. It will continue to provide excellent fishing for 8- to 11- inch crappie, especially during the spawn. Walleye fishing should be fantastic in the near future with excellent survival of stocked fish now providing a good population of 12- to 18-inch fish. The lake has also become renowned for musky with several legal fish noted (40-inch minimum size limit). Good size structure of largemouth bass, channel catfish and bluegill round out the fishery. Recent efforts to reduce phosphorus in the watershed have helped increase water clarity. Sauk County Parks maintains a beach and picnic area on the south end of the lake and three public boat landings are present.

White Mound Lake - This 104-acre reservoir lies entirely within the Sauk County Park located in the west central part of the county. A parking lot, fishing pier and renovated boat launch provide access to this excellent largemouth bass and bluegill fishery.

Baraboo River - The last of 11 dams was removed in October of 2001, allowing the river to become the longest free-flowing stretch of water in the nation (115 miles). This will allow natural fish movement to occur again, and has already been evident based on tagged fish observations. Diversity of fish species also has increased. Five miles of rock riffles within the City of Baraboo have now become available to again provide spawning habitat for downstream Wisconsin River fish such as walleye, sauger, catfish, lake sturgeon and suckers. Lake sturgeon have already been sighted and anglers have reported increased fishing success for smallmouth bass.

Narrows Creek - A great deal of effort has been directed by the Sauk County Land Conservation Department to improve water quality in this heavy, agricultural watershed and by DNR fisheries with streambank and fish habitat improvement on three miles of the upper stream reach. This 18-mile tributary to the Baraboo River had been known for its excellent smallmouth fishery until the mid-1970s. Improvements in phosphorus and sediment reduction will meet the established watershed reduction goals when the construction phase ends in 2004. Recent fish surveys find 5-year classes of smallmouth bass and populations to be at a five-year high in both habitat improvement areas and control areas. This summer a tagged smallmouth bass from the lower Baraboo River was recaptured in upper Narrows Creek. Eventually, summer migrations of bass, catfish and walleye will likely venture into the Narrows, since the door has been opened on the Baraboo with the removal of the 11 dams. – *Dan Fuller, fisheries technician, Poynette*

Sauk and Columbia County trout streams and kids' fishing ponds

The stocking of wild strain trout has shown better survival and increased numbers in most streams. About 80 percent of the streams are stocked, with the others sustained by natural reproduction. The better streams in Columbia County are Rowan and Lodi, while in Sauk County, try Dell and Rowley. During late May and early June the following ponds receive a planting of panfish by local sportsmen's clubs. Try Plenke Pond in Reedsburg, Deppe Pond in Baraboo and Pauquette Pond at Portage. – *Dan Fuller, fisheries technician, Poynette*

Southeast Region

Kenosha County

Vern Wolf Lake - Located in the Bong State Recreation Area, this lake was drawn down and chemically treated in fall 2001 to eradicate undesirable carp and bullheads that had dominated the fish community. The lake was stocked with panfish and gamefish in spring and summer 2002. A fall 2002 electrofishing survey turned up lots of yellow perch, bluegill, and black crappie. Northern pike also are abundant. These fish are on the small side now, but growth should be rapid and quality-size fish should become available to the angler in a couple of years. Largemouth bass are common and walleye are present. Because Vern Wolf Lake lies within the Bong State Recreation Area, its shoreline is undeveloped. Anglers will enjoy an aesthetically pleasing fishing experience as well as having lots of catch-and -release action for panfish and gamefish in 2003. Statewide fishing regulations apply here until March 31, 2003, when the fish community will be managed with special fishing regulations. The aggregate daily bag limit on panfish will be 10, and largemouth bass will have a minimum size limit of 18 inches and a daily bag limit of one. Northern pike have the standard 26-inch minimum size limit and two daily bag limit, and walleye have the standard minimum size limit of 15 inches and a daily bag limit of five.

Lake Andrea - This is a 110-acre quarry lake with a maximum depth of 45 feet and an average depth of 15 feet. It was created in the early 1990s when a gravel pit was abandoned and allowed to flood. It is located within Prairie Springs Park in the Village of Pleasant Prairie, just south of Kenosha. During the last five years DNR and the Village of Pleasant Prairie have stocked northern pike, walleye, largemouth bass, bluegill, yellow perch, and black crappie. Anglers can launch their boat at the ramp off 93rd Place at the northeast end of the lake where parking is available for about four car/trailer units. Statewide fishing regulations apply.

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Powers Lake - Powers Lake is a good bet for nice yellow perch and bluegills. Anglers can get on this lake by using the public boat ramp on the north side of the lake off of County Highway P.

Silver Lake - We have stocked 94,700 walleye into Silver Lake over the last four years, 8,300 of them extended growth fingerlings between 5 and 10 inches long. This has made for some good fishing which should become even better in 2003. Our annual muskellunge stocking program has made this lake a regular for anglers after 40-inch-plus fish. Bucktails and suckers seem to work best. This also is a good lake to try for largemouth bass in the 18- to 20-inch range. A renovated DNR boat launch with ample parking is located on the west side of the lake off of County Highway B about 3/4 mile south of State Highway 50.

Other Kenosha County lakes and rivers

Camp, Center, and Mary Lakes all have public boat ramps and are good bets for bluegill, crappie, bass, northern pike, and walleye. The Fox River is a great place to fish if you like a mixed bag not typically found in most of our lakes. White bass make spring and fall runs and anglers catch lots of them on jigs or minnows. Channel catfish and sheepshead are common in the river. -*Doug Welch, senior fisheries biologist, Sturtevant*

Racine County

Eagle Lake - This lake supports an excellent largemouth bass population. Work the shoreline with minnow imitation lures in the morning or evening in May, early June, and fall. Bass are managed with a special 18-inch minimum size limit and one daily bag limit. We also stock this lake with northern pike and walleye. Recent fish surveys turned up northern pike to 32 inches and walleyes to 25 inches.

Browns Lake - The 16-inch minimum size limit on largemouth bass in Browns Lake has produced an abundant crop. Anglers should have fun catching bass on plastic worms and surface plugs early in the morning all summer long. Northern pike naturally reproduce here and provide good action for ice anglers using shiners. We stocked 40,000 walleye fingerlings in 2002 and are hoping this and subsequent stockings will provide additional angling opportunity in the future. Anglers can get on this lake by using the boat launch and parking lot in Fischer Park off Highway 11 east of the city of Burlington.

Rockland Lake - For anglers with canoes or cartop boats, this is a good choice. Rockland Lake is a small 40-acre lake that supports nice largemouth bass and bluegills. What makes this lake unique is its undeveloped shoreline. YMCA's Camp Maclean and the city of Burlington have left the shoreline largely undisturbed except for a recreational facility and high school to the southwest. When you look up from your bobber or lure you will see upland and lowland forest and a wonderful variety of aquatic plants including water lilies, bullrushes, and cattails. Anglers using minnow imitation lures and plastic worms will do well on bass. The 12- 16 inch protected slot size limit on this lake means anglers can harvest bass under 12 inches and over 16 inches. Carry-in access is available through a city park on Highway 11 just east of Burlington. Parking is available on the south side of the highway.

Other Racine County lakes and rivers

Tichigan, Wind, and Waubeessee Lakes all have public boat launches and are stocked with northern pike and walleyes. Bluegill, crappie, and yellow perch provide good angling for panfisherman on all three lakes.

The Fox River below Rochester and Burlington provides excellent smallmouth bass fishing. Wading anglers do well using nightcrawlers and spinner baits. Stink bait and chicken livers work well on nice channel catfish for anglers fishing in Bushnell Park off of Highway 142 in Burlington. Channel catfish have no size limit and a 10 daily bag limit. We also stock both walleye and northern pike in the Fox River. Another nice thing about fishing this river is that you don't need a boat. Many anglers fish from shore or wade the shallower stretches with slower currents. The fishing season is open year round on the river except for muskellunge, lake sturgeon, trout, and paddlefish. - *Doug Welch, senior fisheries biologist, Sturtevant*

Sheboygan County

Inland fishing on small lakes in Sheboygan County is expected to be similar to years past. Occasionally good panfish action can be found in Crystal, Little Elkhart and Ellen Lakes. Crystal and Random Lakes should again provide very good fishing for largemouth bass. Elkhart Lake is the best county lake for walleye and an occasional musky. The lower Sheboygan River downstream from Johnsonville to Sheboygan Falls can provide very good opportunities in summer for smallmouth bass. - *John E. Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

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Walworth County

Bluff/Whitewater Creek - This is a 4.8 mile spring-fed, coldwater trout stream located south of Whitewater. It is one of the best trout streams in southeastern Wisconsin. Our trout stocking and trout habitat improvement work, together with help from Trout Unlimited, has greatly enhanced the trout population in this stream. We began habitat improvement work in 1980-1981 with 1,320 feet of brush bundles, boom covers, current deflectors and half logs. Next, wild brown trout were transferred to Bluff/Whitewater Creek from Crooked Creek in 1986 and 1987. Believe it or not, we captured one of these old, smart, wild fish in 1999 at which time it was AT LEAST 15 years old! We also stocked the stream with hatchery-strain brown trout between 1988 and 1996. A second habitat improvement project was initiated in 1995; 700 feet of boomcovers and 408 feet of LUNKER structures have been installed since. Last year, 41 of these structures were added along 328 feet of stream. Only wild brown trout have been stocked since 1997. The stocking and habitat improvement program has reaped dividends for trout anglers who report consistent catches of brown trout between 12 and 16 inches. Our electrofishing surveys have turned up brown trout 22 inches and larger. The minimum size limit on this stream is 12 inches for brown and rainbow trout and 8 inches for brook trout. The daily bag limit is three trout. Anglers can access Bluff/Whitewater Creek at County Highway P and downstream at Millis Road.

Delavan Lake - Walleye fishermen will continue to fill the large parking lot off Highway 50 on the north side of Delavan Lake in 2003. Walleye up to 32 inches and 10 pounds have recently been caught here. This special regulation lake has a minimum length limit of 18 inches and a daily bag limit of three. Recent DNR fish surveys show good numbers of legal-size walleyes with 21 percent of the population now exceeding 18 inches! Go after them with a jig and a minnow. Leeches also work well. Increased stocking of fingerlings should keep this lake a walleye hotspot for years to come. We also stock muskellunge annually, with 4,144 muskies stocked in 2002. Musky anglers go after fish up to 48 inches long using suckers and large minnow imitation lures. The minimum size limit on musky is 40 inches and the daily bag limit is one. Naturally reproducing northern pike are plentiful and big in Delavan Lake. The minimum size limit is 32 inches and the daily bag limit is one. Trolling spoons and minnow-type lures, or soaking shiners should produce 11 pounders and larger. Big bluegills still swim these waters despite a 25 daily bag limit. Gills can be caught using leaf worms or grubs in the spring, and dragon fly nymphs in the summer. Foot-long yellow perch can be caught off the bottom using nightcrawler pieces and minnows.

Geneva Lake - Tons of mimic shiners support excellent northern pike, walleye, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and lake trout populations in Geneva Lake. Night fishing along the shoreline and out to 18 feet of water with minnow imitation lures will catch big walleyes. Stepped up fingerling stocking in recent years should maintain an excellent walleye fishery that should provide anglers with plenty of action in the future. Smallmouth and largemouth bass are abundant and healthy and can be caught using nightcrawlers, leeches, plastic worms, and minnow imitation lures. The 32-inch minimum size limit and one daily bag limit is increasing the number of quality-size northern pike. Northerns reproduce naturally in Geneva Lake and provide plenty of action using shiners or chubs in 15 to 30 feet of water. Lake trout feed on mimic shiners and cisco and are in excellent condition. Go after them along the shoreline with downriggers in spring and minnow-type lures in summer. The season for lake trout runs through September 30 with a daily bag limit of two and a minimum size limit of 17 inches. We have also introduced Seeforellen-strain brown trout to Geneva Lake in 2001. These trout grow to exceptional size and should provide an additional angling opportunity. Who knows, maybe the state inland record for brown trout, held by an angler who caught an 18-pounder from Geneva Lake in 1984, will be broken sometime in the future by one of these Seeforellens!

Lake Beulah and Whitewater Lake - These lakes are good bets for quality size largemouth bass. A protected slot size limit on Lake Beulah means anglers cannot keep bass that are 12 inches to 16 inches in length. Surface lures or plastic worms used along the shoreline early in the morning or in the evening when the surface of the water is like glass is an exciting way to catch bass on these lakes.

Lauderdale Lakes - The 841-acre Lauderdale Lakes (Mill, Middle, and Green) are full of largemouth bass. Best times to fish them are during the week and early in the morning. Nice size northern pike also swim these waters. We stocked smallmouth bass here in 2001 and 2002 and plan to stock more in the future to provide another angling opportunity. Across the road from the Lauderdale Lakes is 155 acre Pleasant Lake. This is a beautiful, no-wake lake with lots of undeveloped, wooded shoreline. Anglers go after largemouth bass, bluegills, and walleye here. Access is off highway 67 to a launch ramp and parking lot for 6 car/trailer units. - Doug Welch, senior fisheries biologist, Sturtevant

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Washington County

Big Cedar Lake - This waterbody has the best potential in Washington County to produce trophy walleye and northern pike. Northerns are restricted to a 40-inch minimum size limit and one daily bag limit. We have caught walleyes up to 12 pounds here in our netting surveys. The thermocline usually sets up near 30 to 35 feet in Big Cedar Lake during summer, so walleyes and other gamefish are often found quite deep in this lake. Pike Lake is the lake of choice for good walleye action. This lake has an entirely natural population of walleye that is abundant and features good quality-size fish. Early mornings during the work week seems to be the best time to troll for walleye in the lake. Good early season panfish action can usually be found at the very north end of Big Cedar Lake and parts of Little Cedar Lake. Good opportunities to stream fish for smallmouth bass are usually available in summer throughout the Milwaukee River downstream of West Bend.
- John E. Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth

Waukesha County

Fifteen Waukesha County Lakes are stocked biannually with walleyes, half of them each year. Some are stocked to supplement natural reproduction while others provide walleye fishing where there would otherwise be none. Several lakes have been providing great walleye action.

Pine Lake - Pine Lake, in the northern part of the county, has a natural walleye population that we supplement every two years with stocked fingerlings. Pine provides a tremendous amount of structure and variety of habitats from quiet, shallow bays to sharp drop-offs into 40-foot water. Walleyes move into the shallows in evening to feed. Try fishing just outside the east and west shore bays after sunset.

Oconomowoc Lake - This lake on the Oconomowoc River chain has had great walleye action early and late in the season after dark. The west shore, which has some man-made cribs, and the east basin just outside the narrows, are good places to start.

Pewaukee Lake - Find consistent walleye action here, mainly early morning and late evening into dark, when the lake is quiet. East of Rocky Point is a good place to try. This goes for ice fishing season, as well. - Sue Beyler, senior fisheries biologist, Eagle

Other Waukesha County lakes and streams

A number of smaller lakes are stocked with walleyes and are a good choice for days when the big lakes are too rough or crowded. Denoon, Fowler, Silver and the Phantom lakes can provide a good catch, and are easy to get around in a small boat. Waukesha County lakes get heavy boating use on weekends and nice weekdays. Walleye anglers benefit from the fact that lakes grow quiet in the evening, just when that big one gets hungry!

As we surveyed more and more of the county's streams, we began to find trout populations that we did not know existed. Early in 2002, we formally classified 12 of these streams, offering 44.5 miles as Class I or Class II trout streams. Before this, only two Waukesha County waters were classified trout streams. Classification is based on habitat, existing and potential trout populations, and it affords these streams added regulatory and environmental protection and opens the door to management opportunities.

These new streams will be listed in the 2003 Trout Fishing Regulations and Guide that you can get when you purchase your trout stamp. Most of these streams are very small and run through private land. They are accessible to the public only at road crossings. To avoid trespass on private land, anglers should follow the "keep your feet wet" rule. Streams on private land have not had any habitat enhancements or stream bank brushing. Some are difficult to navigate and fish. Please use your best judgment, and always ask permission before crossing private land. - Sue Beyler, senior fisheries biologist, Eagle

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West Central Region

Mississippi River

Walleye and Sauger - These species continue to be the most sought after recreational fish on the Mississippi River. There are good numbers of walleye ranging from 15 to 20 inches as well as good numbers of fish below the 15-inch size limit. Sauger can be just as plentiful, ranging from 12 to 17 inches. Larger walleye and sauger are also prevalent in the river. Trophy anglers realize the Mississippi River consistently produces walleye over 10 pounds. Certain stretches produce sauger near 20 inches.

Bluegill - Current bluegill populations are rated by many as good to excellent. The size structure appears strong from top to bottom; 7-inch fish and larger are available to anglers. As evidenced by ice anglers' catch during December 2002, great numbers of smaller fish are also waiting to become part of the fishery. Given their fast growth rates, in three or so years these fish will be large enough for the frying pan. Anglers should find bluegill in seasonally productive spots. In most cases, bluegill will be found in slack water habitats during the winter, migrating to flowing channel cover during summer and returning to backwater habitat in late fall.

Crappie - Crappie populations in the river have been stable through the mid- to late-1990s and exceptional fishing can occur. Fyke net surveys during the fall of 2002 found good numbers of 10- to 13- inch crappies.

Smallmouth bass - Smallmouth bass are fast becoming a favorite of many Mississippi River anglers. Great numbers of fish, both above and below the 14-inch size limit, can be found up and down the river. Larger smallmouth bass in the 3- to 5-pound range are not uncommon. With catch-and-release positively impacting the smallmouth fishery, a handful of 6-pound-plus fish are caught each year. Their size structure should remain solid. Fishing near rock is always a good bet for tying into a hard-fighting bronzeback.

Largemouth bass - Largemouth bass populations are extremely dependent upon habitat, especially habitat for the younger fish. The late 1980s and early '90s were difficult for young largemouths due to decreased aquatic vegetation. The middle to late 1990s brought vegetation resurgence that continued through 2002. Largemouth bass responded to this change, and we started sampling more young fish. Over the past few years, largemouth bass numbers have dramatically increased. The current largemouth population, above and below the 14-inch size limit, is good. There's no doubt there will be a lot of legal fish for several years to come. Local anglers favor working wood and vegetation with a white spinnerbait or black and blue jig.

White bass - White bass populations are generally good in the Mississippi River. They're a fast growing species, getting to 12 inches in three to four years. Larger fish in the 14- to 18-inch range are common.

Northern pike - Although the number of northern pike may currently be considered fair, decent fishing is still expected. This is because of fast growth rates, and the fact that few anglers specifically target northern pike. While some inland water bodies produce countless 16- to 20-inch hammer handles, pike on the river are generally larger and more dispersed. Fast growth rates and plentiful food make northern pike nearing 40 inches common. Fyke net surveys during 2002 produced pike that averaged 27 inches. Spinnerbaits and crankbaits around shoreline cover are often effective in summer, when pike are on the move. Tipup fishing in backwaters is effective throughout the winter.

Channel catfish - Growth rates are good while angler exploitation is low. Channels in the 2- to 5-pound range are quite common, with fish nearing 10 pounds often found in the creel. Summer fishing can be quite productive in main channels or running slough habitat. Natural or prepared baits are both commonly used. - *Brian Brecka, fisheries biologist, Alma*

Black, Buffalo, Trempealeau rivers (Buffalo, Clark, Jackson, and Trempealeau counties)

For the past four years, Black River Falls fish crews surveyed trout populations in all area categorized streams. Preliminary results indicate most are producing at or in excess of past levels. In a nutshell, anglers should find plenty of fish waiting for them when they head out to their favorite streams this season.

Trout crews continue to restore habitat in area streams. The latest project is in Pine Creek, a 6.5-mile tributary to the Buffalo River. Pine Creek is located in Trempealeau County between the communities of Osseo and Strum. The majority of the stream bank is either owned by the state or the state has easements — providing ample fishing access to both the lower and upper portions of the stream. Trout work will continue in Pine Creek in 2003.

Fall monitoring surveys of the lower Black River show fish populations to be in good shape. The sport fishery of the lower river consists of walleye, smallmouth bass, northern pike, muskellunge, and catfish. Like many lakes, the lower river is closed to early season fishing to provide extra protection during spring fish spawning activities. The Black River Falls fisheries management crew intends to conduct spring population surveys, especially of walleyes, in the near future to further assess the potential benefits of the closure. Flowages in the Black River Falls area are providing excellent largemouth bass fishing. Many are located in either the state or county forest. — *Dan Hatleli, fisheries biologist, Black River Falls*

(more)

Dunn, Pierce and St. Croix county lakes and streams

Anglers fishing Dunn County should find wild brook trout plentiful in the headwaters of Wilson Creek, Gilbert Creek, Knights Creek and the South Fork of the Hay River. Abundant wild brown trout can be found throughout Elk Creek. Dunn County offers numerous small, less accessible streams with moderate densities of wild brook trout. First-time anglers can try one of the stocked trout streams, such as middle- to downstream-reaches of Bolen Creek, Eighteen Mile Creek, Wilson Creek, Gilbert Creek, South Fork of the Hay River, and Otter Creek.

Pierce County streams will continue to provide outstanding brook and brown trout fishing. The Kinnickinnic, Rush, Trimbelle, and Eau Galle rivers, and Plum, Cady and Isabelle creeks are doing well and are good choices during the 2003 season.

In St. Croix County, the Kinnickinnic River will continue to provide outstanding wild brown trout fishing. Recent surveys of the Kinnickinnic show the average trout size is greater than most years. Parker Creek has fully recovered from a fishkill, and once again provides quality brook and brown trout fishing. Those fishing in the Glenwood City area should find Tiffany and Beaver creeks excellent choices for wild brook trout. Those first-timers, or folks looking for public land opportunities, should try the Willow River at Willow River State Park, the Apple River in Star Prairie Village Park, and the Eau Galle River in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Eau Galle Reservoir Park.

Lake investigations in the area show largemouth bass populations to be in great shape with excellent size structure. Look for excellent bass fishing opportunities in some smaller lakes and flowages throughout the area. In Pierce County try Nugget Lake or Spring Valley Reservoir. In St. Croix County try Little Falls Flowage, Lake Mallalieu, Glen Lake, Squaw Lake, or Bass Lake. In Dunn County, try Lake Eau Galle and Lake Menomin. In Lake Menomin look for largemouth bass in the numerous backwaters and weedy bays.

Several lakes and river systems in the area have high quality smallmouth bass populations. In St. Croix County, Lake St. Croix provides abundant smallmouth bass fishing opportunities.

Walleye reproduction in the area has remained strong for many years. Anglers should anticipate good action. For the best results on the St. Croix River, fish during spring and fall when recreational boating is light. Anglers fishing the Red Cedar River system will find the best fishing upstream of Lake Tainter in the spring and in Lake Tainter during the fall.

Northern pike fishing will remain spotty. However, natural reproduction was strong this year and trophy pike can be found throughout the area. Big pike can be found in the Tainter Lake and St. Croix River systems. Lake Menomin and Little Falls Flowage contain the best densities in the area. Small winterkill lakes in northern St. Croix county will continue to produce excellent northern pike action during winter. - *Marty Engel, senior fisheries biologist, Baldwin*

Lower Red Cedar and Chippewa rivers (Eau Claire, Dunn, Pepin, and Buffalo counties)

Smallmouth bass are the most abundant gamefish on the lower rivers with a fair number of fish greater than 14 inches. Best locations to catch smallmouth are rippapped shorelines or near large woody debris. Anglers can expect to see lower numbers of walleye and sauger on the two rivers due to weaker year classes from 2000-2002 but there are still a modest number of walleye from a strong year class in 1998 that will be near 21 to 23 inches this coming summer. Most walleye and sauger can be found in deep water near in-river cover.

Recent highwater events over the past two springs have lead to near optimal northern pike spawning conditions. Expect to see large numbers of northern pike from 18 to 24 inches. The best northern pike fishing can be found in and near the many backwater bays and sloughs throughout the lower rivers.

Muskellunge numbers on the rivers are low, but recent surveys have documented a modest number of fish greater than 40 inches in length throughout the lower Chippewa River. Best muskellunge opportunities are in and near the Eau Claire area on the Chippewa River.

Numerous state threatened and endangered species can be found in the two rivers. Some of the more common fish that anglers may accidentally catch are paddlefish, river redhorse and blue sucker. If you catch one of these fish, you are required to release this fish by Wisconsin law. - *Heath Benike, regional rivers specialist, Eau Claire*

Dunn, Pepin and Buffalo county streams

Anglers can expect to see low to moderate densities of native brook trout on many of the smaller tributary streams that drain into the lower Chippewa River. Best streams to target this spring in the local area are Arkansaw, Bear, Little Bear, Plum and Bogus creeks. The potential to catch a quality sized brook trout greater than 12 inches exists due to ample forage and excellent growth rates.

In addition, DNR, Pepin County Parks and the Arkansaw Fur-Fish and Game completed an 1,800-foot brook trout habitat restoration project on Arkansaw Creek near the village of Arkansaw. It is expected that the adult brook trout fishery will increase more than 300 percent in the next few years due to the completed habitat restoration work. - *Heath Benike, regional rivers specialist, Eau Claire*

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Chippewa County

Elk Creek - This creek supports the best brown trout fishery in this area. In recent years, approximately 1.5 miles of the stream have undergone habitat improvements with Trout Stamp funds and donations from Trout Unlimited. Look for these improvement areas upstream and downstream of County Highway M, upstream of County Highway N, and downstream of State Highway 29. Habitat improvements have increased the quantity and quality of spawning habitat and cover for trout. In fall 2002, large brown trout were observed on redds in one of the improved sections – a promising and rewarding sight. Anglers looking for brook trout will find better populations in the small, spring-fed tributaries to Elk Creek. Opening day of 2003 anglers will experience a new trout regulation for Elk Creek. Trout from 10-14 inches may not be kept. The daily bag limit will be three trout and only one of these can be over 14 inches. This regulation has been very successful in the section of Elk Creek immediately above Elk Creek Lake. The new regulation will simplify the two previous regulations used on Elk Creek into one that will improve the quality of the entire fishery.

Duncan Creek - Our best brook trout stream in this area, also has undergone recent habitat improvements with the use of Trout Stamp dollars and Trout Unlimited donations. Approximately 3/4 mile of Duncan Creek below State Highway 64 has had major improvements in cover and spawning habitat, which along with a protected-slot size, aided in an improved size structure and higher average weights for individual fish. For the 2003 season, Duncan Creek upstream of the Bloomer dam will have a new protected-slot size. Trout from 10-14 inches may not be kept. The daily bag limit will be five, and only one of these fish can be over 14 inches. This stream, especially in the improved section, has the potential of producing brook trout of exceptional size.

McCann Creek - Historically, this creek has been an excellent brook trout stream. However, problems with land use and beaver created temperature and migration problems for brook trout. In 2001 and 2002, DNR, in cooperation with the Ojibseau Chapter of Trout Unlimited, initiated steps to correct these problems. Three private farm crossings were acting like dams in the stream. Trout Unlimited purchased new culverts for the landowners and Department staff installed them to lower the grade of the crossings, thereby decreasing the backwater effect. This resulted in improved current and substrate conditions for trout. Upstream of this area, habitat improvements were initiated on about 1/4 mile of stream on DNR land adjacent to State Highway 40. Brook trout were observed spawning in this area in fall 2002. More improvements are planned for the future to restore McCann Creek to a high quality brook trout stream. – *Joe Kurz, fisheries biologist, Chippewa Falls*

Holcombe Flowage – This flowage continues as a premier water for musky fishing. A 40-inch minimum size limit enacted in 1992 has provided an excellent fishery of catches greater than 40 inches and an occasional 50-plus inch fish. In fall 2002, an angler caught and released a 49 1/4-inch fish estimated in excess of 30 pounds. This fish was tagged in spring 1994 when it was 38.7 inches, 17 pounds and 7 years old.

Lake Wissota – This continues to be one of the most improved walleye fisheries in west central Wisconsin. The 2001 walleye year class appeared very strong during a spring 2002 survey. These fish, which were around 10 inches in fall 2002, will provide good angling action in 2003, but may not be of a desirable size for harvest until fall. The 14-18 inch protected slot size has improved the walleye size structure. Anglers are catching more fish greater than 18 inches than before this limit. Only one fish over 18 inches may be kept per day. Some anglers report the walleye fishing on Lake Wissota is the best in more than 30 years.

Another great comeback for Lake Wissota is its bluegill population. Spring 2002 surveys found many bluegills 7 inches and larger. Little Lake Wissota and the Yellow River area provide the best panfishing opportunities, however, anglers should not overlook the fish cribs in the main body of the lake. Crappies remain the staple panfish in the lake. Many crappies over 9 inches were caught during spring surveys. Anglers reported excellent crappie fishing in 2002, particularly in the spring. Smallmouth bass fishing has been improving steadily; 38 percent of the fish caught in our survey were over the 14-inch minimum size limit. For smallmouth bass, anglers should work rip-rapped shorelines, fallen timber along the shoreline or the riverine portion of the flowage below the Jim Falls dam. Largemouth bass fishing is minimal in the lake but a few lunkers are caught every year. 2002 marked the first year of a three-year effort to restore largemouth bass populations in the lake. With improving populations of aquatic vegetation and the elimination of late-winter drawdowns, this stocking effort is expected to produce a quality fishery in a few years.

Sand Lake - A comprehensive survey of Sand Lake on the Chippewa-Rusk County line was conducted in 2002. Sand Lake is stocked with walleye and muskellunge in alternate years. Both species are doing well in the lake. The density of adult walleye is one fish per acre. This may appear low, but it is within the density range for stocked populations. Excellent growth rates and an 18-inch minimum size limit aid in producing a quality walleye fishery. Our survey catch yielded 55 percent of the walleyes above the minimum size limit. Sand Lake is a clear, deep lake with a cisco forage base. This makes for difficult walleye fishing during summer. Some of the best fishing for walleye is in the spring during late evening. Good growth rates also are evident in the musky population. The largest fish, 49.2 inches and 30.5 pounds, was only a 12-year-old. Black crappies are the panfish of choice in Sand Lake, with many fish over 9 inches. The lake also has abundant, slow-growing populations of largemouth bass, bluegill and yellow perch. – *Joe Kurz, fisheries biologist, Chippewa Falls*

(more)

Eau Claire County

Lake Eau Claire – This lake also exhibited a strong 2001 year class of walleye. Few fish over the 15-inch minimum size limit were caught during a spring 2002 survey. However, at the time of our survey, most adults were upstream of the lake spawning in the Eau Claire River. The lake has good populations of bluegill, yellow perch and black crappie. Very few quality-size perch and crappies were caught, but bluegills 7 inches and larger were common.

Lowes Creek - This creek has been stocked the past four years with a wild strain of brown trout instead of the domestic strain that had been stocked previously. No surveys have been conducted yet to evaluate this stocking effort, however, anglers who have reported catching these wild fish have high praise for the quality of these fish. We hope that survival rates for these wild fish will be greater than for domestic trout strains, and that the fishery's quality will improve. If funding is available, a survey will be conducted in 2003 to evaluate this stocking effort. – *Joe Kurz, fisheries biologist, Chippewa Falls*

Jackson County

A fishing opportunity that once was lost is now available in Jackson County. After sitting almost dry since the flood of 1993, the Hatfield power canal and associated backwaters are full of water. Hatfield Hydropower reconstructed banks of the power canal that washed out in the 1993 flood and consequent power generation has filled the backwaters up. The area previously provided good fishing for a variety of game and panfish species. Migrations of fish from the upper and lower watershed are naturally repopulating the fishery with walleyes, black crappie, smallmouth bass, northern pike, and muskellunge. Supplemental rehabilitation stocking of the canal occurred in spring 2001 when more than 400 pounds of bluegills, crappies, yellow perch, northern pike, and largemouth bass were transferred in from Lake Como in Chippewa County. The fish transfer was a cooperative effort between Bloomer and Eau Claire and DNR's Black River Falls fisheries staff. Local anglers are already reporting catches of all fish species and this success should continue in 2003. – *Dan Hatleli, fisheries biologist, Black River Falls*

Trout fishing in La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford and Monroe counties

Trout fishing continues to improve in many of the coulee streams due to a combination of improving land use practices, aggressive habitat restoration efforts, numerous stream surveys and the wild trout program.

In 1976 there were 545.5 miles of classified trout water in our four-county area. By 2000, stream surveys found another 264 miles of trout water to add to the "Trout Stream Book," bringing the total for the four counties to 809.5 miles of classified water. We anticipate an additional 50-75 miles being added by the 2003 season as a result of surveys conducted in the last two years.

The real bright spots have been the increasing numbers of *wild brook trout* streams in the area. As potential waters are identified through the survey process, wild brook trout are either transferred to the stream or put on quota to receive "feral" trout from our statewide hatchery system. Growth rates on these fish has been phenomenal, with fish stocked at 5 inches reaching 9 to 12 inches in one year. In 2002, several brook trout over 18 inches were taken from area streams. To protect these harvest-sensitive species, a number of streams will be designated as Category 5 streams in 2003, which means catch-and-release only, and use of artificial baits.

For anglers who may be looking for trophy brown trout there are several waters in the area that 40 years ago were considered "nontrout" but are now producing brown trout in excess of 25 inches. Three brown trout greater than 27 inches, along with many more greater than 18 inches, were caught in area streams in 2002.

For anglers looking for a few fish for the frying pan, several streams with high densities of brown trout will have more liberal bag limits to encourage some harvest in 2003. The daily limit on these waters will increase from three to five fish but the size limit will change to a maximum of 12 inches. Any fish caught exceeding 12 inches in length must be immediately returned to the stream. Anglers should read the trout regulation pamphlet for a listing of these changed waters.

There are numerous streams with public access in the four counties thanks to an aggressive angler access program. In the last 30 years, almost 200 miles of public access has been secured either through streambank easements purchased from willing landowners or from numerous small state owned properties. County "plat" books purchased at many county seats will identify state owned properties. – *Dave Vetrano, fisheries supervisor, La Crosse*

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Where to fish?

Whether you're fishing for a shore lunch, seeking out smallies or pursuing the mighty musky, this fishing report can help guide you to the fishing experience you're after. For more ideas, visit www.fishingwisconsin.org then look under "fishing in Wisconsin" for "where to fish." Or visit www.waterworkswonders.org, the Web site the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation maintains with maps and other access information.

Need a fishing license?

3 quick and convenient ways:

Call toll free at 1-877-945-4236

Go online to www.wildlifelicense.com/wi

Visit any license agent location or DNR service center

Need to borrow fishing tackle?

Rods and reels, hooks and other fishing equipment are available from some state parks and DNR offices. If you want to take a large group fishing, call ahead to reserve equipment and consider taking an angler education instructor course. For a list of loaner sites and more information on introducing kids to fishing, go to www.fishingwisconsin.org then look under "kids, parents and educators."